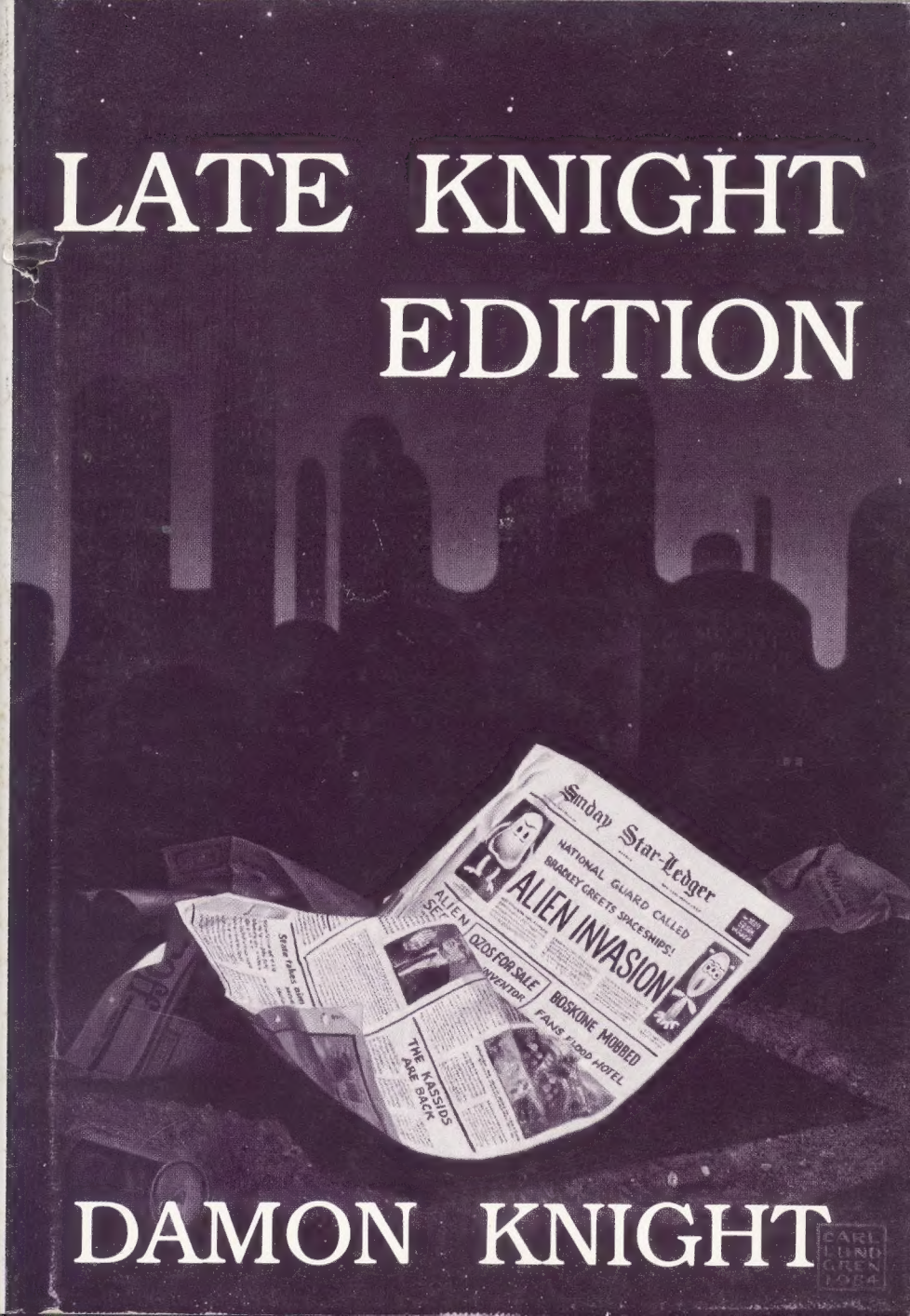
LATE KNIGHT EDITION



DAMON KNIGHT

Late Knight Edition is published in conjunction with the appearance of Damon Knight as Guest of Honor at Boskone XXII. It contains 6 Knight stories and 2 essays, including a story that has never previously been printed. Among those included are:

- "I See You," a Hugo nominee in which anyone can see anyone and anything, past or present, and there is no such thing as privacy;
- "Tarcan of the Hoboes," a parody of Tarzan in which the son of an American millionaire is raised in the wild by hoboes;
- "The Cage," a previously unpublished story about a man's attempt to escape the cage his life has become;
- "Good-bye, Henry J. Kostkos, Goodbye," an insightful, biting essay about science fiction's old guard.

Cover painting by Carl Lundgren.

LATE KNIGHT EDITION

Damon Knight

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Jim Mann, Editor
Cambridge, Mass.
December 1, 1984

INTRODUCTION

Going through a collection like this is time travel in many ways. What we ask in time travel stories usually is what will it be like, or what was it like. If you browse in an old family album and identify yourself through many ages, you will always find the same you in different flesh, heavier, lighter, maybe in funny clothes, taller, but always you, and this, too, is time travel of a sort. What was it like then? What were you like then? The evidence of the photographs is undeniable, documenting the growth and development of a person, but says nothing of what the interior development was like. Stories that span nearly forty years reveal a different process: the development of a literary artist, and this too is undeniable. Here it is in print speaking out from the past.

The sampling here is small, too small to be definitive, but even so, we can trace the same voice from the beginning throughout to the latest work. It is a voice finding its range, finding its power, always becoming clearer and truer.

The oldest story here is "The Third Little Green Man," and this is an impossible story. An impossible galactic empire, impossible space ship and crew, an impossible

mission, an impossible planet and inhabitants, even an impossible barroom brawl lifted bodily from mining movies of the thirties. And yet. It's the *and yet* that is important here. Everyone was doing this sort of story, and many still are, alas, but everyone went to the parade, too, and only one voice piped up about the emperor's interesting condition.

The deftness that has come to characterize all of Damon's work is already apparent in this early story, as well as the exact observation and precision of language in which to describe it. Damon has perfected this very strong triad over the years and everything he writes is supported by it.

Five years later, in 1953, "Definition" was published. At that time hardly anyone was bothering about the use of the word Man to mean all of us. This story hangs on that misuse of language. It's a bit contrived and conventional in the use of science fiction concepts, but it really isn't about aliens, after all.

These two stories are early Knight. There are threads that run through them all—aliens, interstellar travel, the ingenuity of the human race. Damon began out in space and now has come home to Earth, bringing the aliens here, to be sure. There is a thread of religious questioning in both, not dominating the stories, but there. And there is always the question, who are we? What makes us tick? Holding the magnifying glass on aliens is one way of investigating the question. But sometimes the glass turns into a mirror and the aliens we find are ourselves.

We jump forward to the early seventies for "I See You." The craft that was already good has become true artistry, the details so carefully chosen and lovingly worded are exactly right. The result is a hauntingly beautiful story that is like

looking through a mirror to see yourself looking through a mirror, on and on. Later you might say, no, the world couldn't become like that, but you believe while you read, and you wish, you wish.

There may be people reading this who have never read Edgar Rice Burroughs' novel *Tarzan* and I would love to know how they react to "Tarcan of the Hoboes." Damon complains that he gets letters now and then asking why he wrote something or other. If one of those letters was about this story, I can answer: Because it was such fun. It must have been fun to write; it certainly is fun to read, and in its own insane way it even works as a story. I wish I had thought of it.

"I was aware that the Victorian life I was attempting to recreate within these walls was not the reality." That life is recreated; one fine stroke after another brings it to life, and when that life is contrasted to contemporary life, it is a dash of shocking cold water. In "La Ronde" you will go around and around searching for reality. And your hand will close on air. It is all real; none of it is real, and the two statements mean the same thing. You are sent back to yourself to examine what you mean by reality.

Damon often advises students to look at the inversion of any commonly held belief for story ideas. One such belief is that many a man has been saved by the love of a good woman. The word "saved" is the one inverted in the story "The Cage." I watched Damon research this story. He haunted the post office until I was afraid we might have a visit by an inspector ourselves. He corresponded with people who have worked for the post office. All the details are right. But it isn't the exactitude of the worked-out plot or the

details that linger in my mind. It is the final image and it is unforgettable. Damon chooses quite an objective viewpoint in his fiction most of the time. He does not tell you what to feel, how to regard his characters; you seldom are allowed in their heads, and when you are, it is to see their thought processes, not to feel their emotions. When an intellectual experience suddenly flips and becomes an emotional one, it has great power, you are caught off guard and defenseless. This is not the sort of thing one can teach another to do; all one can do is to point to it when it happens and say, here's an example of that. "The Cage" is an example of that.

These are the stories. The essays will tell you Damon's thoughts much better that I can. This, I repeat, is time travel of a sort, from the beginning when Damon first found his voice and yodeled down the mountains, brash perhaps, but joyous too, until the most recent, very mature offerings. The voice is getting better all the time.

Kate Wilhelm

LATE

KNIGHT

EDITION

WHAT IS SCIENCE FICTION?

Once at a Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference I said a colleague's punctuation was wrong; he replied that he didn't agree with me. I failed to ask him why he thought punctuation was a matter of opinion, but I brooded over this later, and finally realized that he was talking about what the rules of punctuation ought to be, while I was talking about what they are. One is arguable, the other not.

In a similar way, science fiction writers and critics have been trying without success for forty years to define science fiction, because each of them has been talking about his own idea of what the field ought to be, never about what it is. Intent on distinguishing the true sf from the false, they invariably find that most of it is false; thus Heinlein casts out "space opera," Bailey "scientific romance," Asimov social satire, de Camp divides fiction into imaginative stories (including science fiction) and realistic stories; Heinlein insists that sf is a branch, and the most important branch, of realistic fiction.

Here are some other attempts:

"Science fiction is the search for a definition of man

and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science), and is characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode."—Brian W. Aldiss. (This admits *The Fountainhead,* by Ayn Rand, but excludes Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity.*)

"The more powers above the ordinary that the protagonist enjoys, the closer the fiction will approach to hard-core science fiction. Conversely, the more ordinary and fallible the protagonist, the further from hard-core."—Aldiss. (This admits *Dracula* as hard-core science fiction, but excludes "Night" by John W. Campbell.)

"A handy short definition of almost all science fiction might read: realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the scientific method. To make this definition cover all science fiction (instead of 'almost all') it is necessary only to strike out the word 'future.'"—Robert A. Heinlein. (This admits *Arrowsmith,* by Sinclair Lewis, but excludes the collected works of Robert Sheckley.)

"There is only one definition of science fiction that seems to make pragmatic sense: 'Science Fiction is anything published as science fiction.'"—Norman Spinrad. (This admits Spinrad's "The Last Hurrah of the Golden Horde," but excludes the book version of Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz.*)

Taken together (if anyone were idiot enough to try), these definitions would narrow the field of science fiction almost to invisibility. Yet nearly every critic claims an intuitive knowledge of what sf is, and I claim it myself. We do know the difference between stories that are perceived as science fiction and those that are not; the question is, how do we know?

In an attempt to find out, I wrote a list of promising definitions and checked them against works published as science fiction to see how well they matched. This is the list:

1. Science. (Gernsback.)
2. Technology and invention. (Heinlein, Miller.)
3. The future and the remote past, including all time travel stories. (Bailey.)
4. Extrapolation. (Davenport.)
5. Scientific method. (Bretnor.)
6. Other places — planets, dimensions, etc., including visitors from the above. (Bailey.)
7. Catastrophes, natural or manmade. (Bailey.)

I discarded other definitions, for instance Campbell's dictum that sf is predictive, which I thought were impossible to evaluate. (To find out how many sf stories contain accurate predictions I would have to wait until the results are all in, i.e., to the end of the universe.) I also discarded all negative definitions, e.g., that any story that contains fantasy elements is not sf (because that excludes Heinlein's "Waldo"), or that any story that is literature is not sf (because that excludes Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*).

For source material I used *Nebula Award Stories Eight, The Hugo Winners, Volume Two,* and *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One,* in the belief that any defect in the hypothesis would show up here first. I added recent issues of the three leading sf magazines, and recent volumes of three hardcover series, plus a one-shot anthology, Spinrad's *The New Tomorrows,* which I chose because it is devoted to "New Wave" sf[1].

On the basis of the results (see tables), I conclude that a story containing three or more of the elements listed above is usually perceived as science fiction; with two, it is perceived as borderline; with one or none, it is non-science fiction.

Nebula Award Stories Eight	science	technology	future, past	extrapolation	scientific method	other places	catastrophes	total
A Meeting With Medusa, Clarke	•	•	•	•	•	•		6
Shaffery Among the Immortals, Pohl	•	•			•			3
Patron of the Arts, Rotsler		•	•	•				3
When It Changed, Russ	•	•	•			•	•	5
On the Downhill Side, Ellison								0
The Fifth Head of Cerberus, Wolfe	•	•	•	•	•	•		6
When We Went to See the End of the World, Silverberg	•	•	•	•			•	5
Goat Song, Anderson	•	•	•	•				4
				average: 4.0				

The Hugo Winners, Volume Two								
The Dragon Masters, Vance	•	•	•			•		4
No Truce With Kings, Anderson		•	•	•		•	•	5
Soldier, Ask Not, Dickson		•	•	•		•		4
"Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman, Ellison		•	•	•				3
The Last Castle, Vance	•	•	•	•		•		5
Neutron Star, Niven	•	•	•	•		•		5
Weyr Search, McCaffrey	•	•	•	•		•		5
Riders of the Purple Wage, Farmer		•	•	•				3
Gonna Roll the Bones, Leiber								0
I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream, Ellison		•	•	•				3
Nightwings, Silverberg	•	•	•	•				4

The Hugo Winners (cont'd)	science	technology	future, past	extrapolation	scientific method	other places	catastrophes	total
The Sharing of Flesh, Anderson	•	•	•	•		•		5
The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World, Ellison		•				•		2
Time Considered as a Helix of Semiprecious Stones, Delany	•	•	•	•			•	5
				average: 3.8				
The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One								
A Martian Odyssey, Weinbaum	•	•	•	•	•	•		6
Twilight, Campbell	•	•	•	•		•	•	6
Helen O'Loy, del Rey		•	•	•				3
The Roads Must Roll, Heinlein		•	•	•				3
Microcosmic God, Sturgeon	•	•	•		•			4
Nightfall, Asimov	•				•	•	•	4
The Weapon Shop, van Vogt		•	•	•		•		4
Mimsy Were the Borogoves, Padgett		•	•			•		3
Huddling Place, Simak		•	•	•		•	•	5
Arena, Brown		•	•	•	•	•		5
First Contact, Leinster		•	•	•	•	•		5
That Only a Mother, Merril		•	•	•				3
Scanners Live in Vain, Smith		•	•			•		3
Mars is Heaven!, Bradbury		•	•	•		•		4
The Little Black Bag, Kornbluth	•	•	•	•				4
Born of Man and Woman, Matheson								0

The Science Fiction Hall of Fame (cont'd)	science	technology	future, past	extrapolation	scientific method	other places	catastrophes	total
Coming Attraction, Leiber		•	•	•			•	4
The Quest for Saint Aquin, Boucher		•	•	•			•	4
Surface Tension Blish	•	•	•	•		•		5
The Nine Billion Names of God, Clarke		•		•			•	3
It's a *Good* Life, Bixby						•		1
The Cold Equations, Godwin		•	•	•		•		4
Fondly Fahrenheit, Bester		•	•	•				3
The Country of the Kind, Knight		•	•	•				3
Flowers for Algernon, Keyes	•		•		•			3
A Rose for Ecclesiastes, Zelazny		•	•			•	•	4
				average: 3.7				

Test Cases								
Gulliver's Travels, Swift	•	•		•		•		4
Walden Two, Skinner	•				•			2
1984, Orwell		•	•	•				3
Watch the North Wind Rise, Graves			•					1
The Metamorphosis, Kafka								0
Winnie the Pooh, Milne						•		1
The Wind in the Willows, Grahame								0
Alice in Wonderland, Carroll						•		1
The Sword in the Stone, White			•					1
Robinson Crusoe, Defoe				•				1

I had better emphasize that these scores say nothing about the quality of the stories, or about the quality of the science, the extrapolation, etc. If an element was present in a story, no matter how perfunctory or feeble, I scored it.

I also ran some test cases. The system held up well for these, with the single exception of *Gulliver's Travels,* which scored a 4, although it is not usually perceived as sf. To cure this, I would have to add the negative definition that nothing published before 1860 is science fiction, a perception due partly to tradition and, I think, partly to the desire to get rid of all the Lucians and Cyranos who have been dragged in by overanxious scholars.

In the course of this study my own perceptions were altered. At the end of it I found that I agreed with C. S. Lewis when he said that not all romances laid in the future are science fiction. I lost some (not all) of my dedication to a very broad definition of sf, one which would include any work of fiction informed by a scientific attitude toward nature and man. I became more aware of the sleights practiced by commercial sf writers to ensure that their work will be perceived as science fiction, and to get work published which could as well have been written as mundane adventure fiction. I also became more aware of the number of non-sf stories regularly published in nearly all the magazines and hardcover series, including my own.

I offer this study as an extended definition of what science fiction is. Like other people, I have an opinion about what it should be. I would like to see less dependence on conventional stage furniture and more on honestly worked out extrapolations. I am inclined to agree with Alexei and Cory Panshin when they say that sf and fantasy as we know them are two filled-in areas in a broad, largely empty field. I

believe more strongly than before that science fiction has not yet found its limits.

"Science fiction" and "literature" are not mutually exclusive terms. I propounded this as a heresy in 1952, and it is still so regarded, not only by hostile critics but by many of sf's defenders. The proposition "If it's sf, it isn't literature" is is self-prooving: "'But this looks good.' 'Well then, it's not sf.'" And around we go again.

There is general agreement that science fiction has some essential attraction which is not easy to capture in words but which is unmistakable to a receptive reader. Kingsley Amis refers to this when he gives excerpts from two sf novels, and then remarks, "...anybody encountering such passages who fails to experience a peculiar interest, related to, but distinct from, ordinary literary interest, will never be an addict of science fiction." Basil Davenport, noting the argument as to whether *Arrowsmith* should be considered science fiction, says that he read the book at a time when he was avidly searching for sf, and yet it never crossed his mind that this might be it. Isaac Asimov says that Plato, More and Swift are works of imagination, "but they do not have the *intent* of science fiction." I don't know what Isaac's version of the intent of sf is, but probably it has something to do with giving the same essential thrill of difference that Amis is talking about, and that Davenport failed to find in *Arrowsmith*[2].

To say that this quality is characteristic of science fiction is not to say that it is always present, however, or that sf can have no other quality, no other way of appealing to its readers.

Science fiction, as C. S. Lewis points out, is not all one thing. Even in its commercial history in the United States, dating from the early years of the century, it has undergone

repeated infusions from other kinds of fiction—dime-novel fiction beginning about 1900, pulp adventure fiction in the early thirties, slick fiction in the late thirties and forties, women's-magazine and little-magazine fiction in the early fifties, avant-garde fiction in the sixties and seventies.

Every one of these transformations has provoked cries of outrage from old-guard editors and writers, but not one of them has obliterated previous forms—the latter are all still alive, even the Gernsbackian story (see Isaac Asimov's "Take a Match" in *New Dimensions II*). Adventure sf, now more than forty years old, accounts for more than half the science fiction on the newsstands.

Brian Stableford, in "Science Fiction: a Sociological Perspective" (*Fantastic,* March 1974), makes the interesting suggestion that "the identity of SF—the identity of the social phenomenon called SF—is not to be found in its content; it is to be found in the way people *use* it, the way people orient themselves towards it, and in the way which it orients *them* to matters external to it." What Stableford appears to overlook is that different people use sf in different ways. He identifies himself as a writer of trash, says that many such writers make a living at their trade, and therefore that sf must be "*useful* at a trash level." So far he is on safe ground, but he errs when he says that "with few exceptions, books labeled as SF tend to sell the same number of copies, regardless of literary merit or seriousness of intent." By and large, the first printings of sf books sell within a very narrow range. For the pure article of commerce, the kind of thing Stableford is talking about, that's the end—the book has had its one printing and will never be seen again. Science fiction books of unusual merit are reprinted over and over.

Earlier, Stableford argues that Verne and Wells are not part of "the same social phenomenon as science fiction,"

because the phenomenon did not exist when they wrote. "When *The Time Machine*—the Wells story which seems to live most meaningfully within the SF paradigm—was written, the paradigm did not exist. It did not then belong to the same subculture which SF belongs to, even to the same type of subculture.... It is now possible for us to *use The Time Machine* as SF, and to meaningfully speak of it as SF. We may also *use* as SF the works of Verne, of Cyrano de Bergerac, of Voltaire and of Lucian of Samosata, but...it is a conceptual mistake to think that because I, in 1973, can read *The Time Machine* as science fiction, H. G. Wells, in 1895, *wrote The Time Machine* as science fiction."

This curious statement needs some interpretation. Let me approach it from the rear. During the recent wave of permissiveness, several paperback publishers put out lines of well-written erotic novels. They didn't sell. Hardcore pornography fans don't want good writing, characterization, vividness, insight, or any other literary quality—not only don't want it, but are actively annoyed by it. So with the lowest class of sf readers, and I think we ought to have a term for the crude, basic kind of sf that satisfies the appetite for pseudo-scientific marvels without appealing to any other portion of the intellect: I propose that we call it "sci-fi."[3]

Substitute this for "science fiction" in Stableford's essay: the argument then reads that since there was no audience of sci-fi readers when Wells wrote *The Time Machine,* it was not sci-fi when he wrote it. This makes perfect sense.

What is alarming is the suspicion that not only Stableford but other and more literate critics of the field are really sci-fi readers. Some of the most industrious promoters of science fiction, when they announce that sf is good, may only mean it is good junk. This is hardly more comforting than being told it is bad junk. Of the flock of pop culture

enthusiasts who have descended on sf lately, how many are crypto-sci-fi-sniffers?

NOTES

1. I omit these from the tables because they will be out of date by the time this book is published, but, for the record, *Galaxy* scored an average of 3.8, *Analog* 3.2, *New Dimensions* 3.2, *Orbit* 3.2, *Universe* 3.2 (like a sampling of near beers), *F&SF* 1.4, and *The New Tomorrows* 1.3.

2. I read *Arrowsmith* for the first time recently, and concluded that in an odd way it is the antithesis of science fiction. In a realistic novel set in the past or present, nothing can happen that would conspicuously alter the real world as we know it: therefore Lewis's hero, although he develops a new serum, has no place in history because someone else (a real person) beats him to it. This is just the opposite of what happens in a science fiction story, where the *consequences* of the invention or discovery are all-important.

3. Pronounced "skiffy."

THE THIRD LITTLE GREEN MAN

Shoemaker sat in the open sallyport of the ship and looked gloomily at a pale blue-green seascape, parted down the middle by a ghostly shoreline. The sea was a little greener and the land was a little bluer; otherwise there was no difference to the eye. Once in a while a tiny breeze came in from the sea, and then the stink changed from sulphur to fish.

Venus, he decided, was a pest-hole. If he'd known it would be like this, he would have socked old Davies in the eye when he came to him with his damned plans. And then he'd have got roaring drunk to celebrate his escape.

Drunk... Boy, he'd been squiffed last night! And every night, except one horrible period when they'd found his cache and it had been three days before he could shut off the engines and make more. Thinking of that, he shuddered. Better get started early tonight; no telling when the others would be back.

He rose and went back into the stifling heat of the ship. No cooling system in the thing; that's one item he hadn't thought of. But then, to hear Davies and Burford talk, Venus was going to be a kind of Turkish paradise, full of pomegranates

and loose women. Nothing had been said about the temperature or the smells.

He walked down the narrow passageway to the hold, entered one of the compartments, and stopped before a patched section of the bulkhead. The ship was practically nothing *but* patches, and this looked no different from the rest. But it was.

Shoemaker stuck a fingernail under the lower end of the metal strip, and pulled. The strip came loose. He got his finger all the way under and lifted. The soldered edges tore away like so much glue.

He caught the section as the top came away, and laid it aside. Behind it, in a space where plastic filler had been removed, were stacked bottles of a colorless liquid. He took one of them out and shoved it into his back pocket. Then he picked up the patch sheet and, holding it in place with one hand, took a metal-foil tube out of his pocket with the other. The gunk in the tube was his own discovery: a phony solder fluid that was pretty nearly as strong as the real thing, except that the slightest leverage would pull it loose. He smeared a thin film of the stuff all around the patch, held the sheet for a few seconds more while it dried, then stood off to examine his work. Perfect.

The bottle in his pocket was uncomfortably warm against his thin rump. Well, he could fix that, too. He went down the passage to the next compartment, jockeyed an oxygen tank around until he could get at the petcock, and held the bottle in a thin stream of the compressed gas. In a minute the liquor was chilled.

He was sweating prodigiously. Gasping a little, he went back to the sallyport and sat down. He settled his broad back against the doorway, put the neck of the bottle against his pursed lips, and drank.

He was lowering his head after the fifth long swallow, when he saw something move against the misty boundary of sea and land. He followed it with his eyes. His long "Ahhh" of satisfaction ended in the sound of a man treacherously struck in the belly.

A little green man was standing there, a little poisonous-green man with blue-green whiskers and eyes like emeralds. He was about fourteen inches high, counting his big rabbit ears. He had an ominous look on his face.

Shoemaker gaped. Suddenly, the things Burford had been telling him, this morning before he and the other two had left to go exploring, began to run through his mind. *Flesh and blood can stand just so much, Jim. One of these days a pink elephant or a polka-dot giraffe is going to step out of a bottle and say to you—*

"Shoemaker, your time has come."

He jumped a foot. He was quivering all over.

Just as Shoemaker was telling himself that it couldn't possibly have happened, the little man moved a step forward and said it again.

Shoemaker dived for the door and slammed it after him. Ten minutes later, when he stopped shaking long enough to open it again, the little green man was gone.

This was not so good, Shoemaker told himself. Whether it was the d.t.'s or just a hallucination brought on by chilled liquor in a hot climate, that green man was nothing he wanted to have around.

He started thinking about what Burford and Davies and Hale would do if they found out he'd started seeing things. They'd taken a lot from him, because he was the only man who could hold the *Space Queen* together; but this might be too much.

For instance, there was his habit of stopping the engines whenever he ran out of liquor. Well, he had an alibi for that, anyway. Two days out of New York, they'd found his supply of Scotch and dumped it into space. Fighting mad, he'd waited until the others were asleep, then disconnected the transmutator that fed the rocket motors and adjusted it to turn out pure grain alcohol. With the addition of a little grapefruit juice from the stores, it made a fair-to-middling tipple. He'd kept going on it ever since.

But, if there were green men in it...

Shuddering, he went outside to wait for Davies and the other two. It was a little cooler now, with the sun clear around on the other side of the planet, but it was also a lot darker. Shoemaker turned on the light in the sallyport and stood under it, nervously peering into the blackness.

Presently he heard a hail, and then saw the three lights coming toward him. Three of them; that meant nobody had been devoured by saber-toothed pipicacas, or whatever cockeyed carnivores there were on this Turkish bath of a world. That was good. If anybody killed any of them—big, slow-thinking Davies, the chubby, drawling Hale—or Burford, in particular—Shoemaker wanted it to be him.

That was Burford now. "Seen any elephants?"

Damn him. There went Shoemaker's idea of asking casually if they'd seen any little green creatures around. Burford was feeling sharp tonight, and he'd pounce on that like a cat.

The three slogged into the circle of light. They looked a little tired, even the whipcord-lean Burford. Their boots were crusted with blue-gray mud almost to the knees.

"Have any trouble finding your way back?" Shoemaker

asked. Davies shook his big head slowly. He looked a little surprised. "No... No, there's a river up yonder about a mile, you know. We saw it when we landed...."

"Jim was out cold at the time," Burford put in. He grinned nastily at Shoemaker.

"So we just followed it up a ways and then back," Davies finished, putting his knapsack down on the galley table. He sat down heavily. "We didn't see a thing... not a thing. Looks like we'll have to pick up the ship and use it to cruise around... but we can't spare much fuel, you know." He looked reproachfully at Shoemaker. "We used up so much correcting course every time you shut off the engines..."

Shoemaker felt himself getting hot. "Well, if you three commissars hadn't heaved out my Scotch—"

"Okay, okay, break it up," said Hale boredly. He let his soft bulk down into a chair. Burford stood up, leaning against the bulkhead.

"You hear anything on the radio, Shoemaker?" Hale asked.

Shoemaker shook his head. "Had it on all day," he said. "Not a peep."

"I don't get it," Burford said. "Radio signals started practically as soon as we hit atmosphere. They wavered, but we traced them down right about here. Then, as soon as we landed, they quit. There's something funny about that."

"Well, now," said Davies, wagging his head, "I wouldn't exactly say it was *funny*, Charley.... Now you take us, there might be any number of reasons why we'd quit signaling, if it was the Venusians landing on Earth instead of us the other way around...." He sighed. "But it comes to this, boys. If there are any animals on Venus, intelligent or otherwise, it makes no never-mind, we've got to find 'em. We got to have *some* kind o' specimens to take back, or we're sunk. You

remember how much trouble we had, just getting the Supreme Council to subsidize us at all...."

Shoemaker remembered. Davies' math was all right; it was the only language he really knew his way around in. And he had the fuel, and the motor. All he needed was money to build a ship. But he'd picked the wrong time for it.

It had been just five years after the end of World War III when Davies had started making plans for his ship. The World Federation was only four and a half years old, and still bogged down in a quagmire of difficulties. What with two Balkan and three Indian principalities still "unreconstructed," ousted officials of other retarded nations raising hell with underground movements, the world rearming for still another war—plus a smashed, half-starving empire, smouldering with atomic fire, to deal with—the Supreme Council had little time or money to give to space flight.

Davies, though, had had his first and only non-mathematical idea, and it was a good one. This is the way it added up. The World Federation argued, reasonably, that the only way to police the world effectively against the possibility of another war was for everybody to come into the W. F. But the hold-out nations in Europe and America, who had been neutral during the last conflict—and were powerful out of all proportion simply because they had—plus the millions of emigres who had set up shop in South America and Africa, replied that the W. F. wasn't going to police *them*, and that they'd sooner *have* another war and, furthermore, that if the W. F. thought it could win it, let them go ahead and drop the first bomb.

The result was an impasse that was throwing the World's Cultural Rehabilitation Program all out of kilter. Well, said Davies, suppose it were possible to prove to the reactionary

nations that Venus was habitable—wouldn't they jump at the chance to avoid World War IV by moving out entirely? Then the W. F. would be able to go about its business, organizing the Earth into One World—until it was so strong that the Venus colony would be a pushover, and serve them right.

Meanwhile, what if there were intelligent life on Venus—intelligent enough to be a new source of cheap labor, now that every world citizen was demanding that his working day be cut immediately to five hours?

The bored Bureau Chief to whom Davies had talked had nodded thoughtfully and said there might be something in it, and a few months later Davies had been set up as head of a new Department, with a wholly inadequate appropriation.

Burford and Hale had been assigned to the project by the North American Labor Bureau, and Shoemaker, appealed to by Davies, had joined up principally because it was a tough job. Then they'd gone to work, spending the money in driblets as they got it. They'd had to revise the specifications downward half a dozen times, and when they were through, the *Space Queen* was a rule-of-thumb monstrosity that only a mechanical genius could hold together. Shoemaker was the genius.

He thought about the time the meteor had hulled them, piercing both shop walls and banging hell out of the compartment across the corridor. Shoemaker had been in the shop, so drunk he could hardly stand up; but he'd held his breath long enough to slap a patch over the hole through which all the air in that section had gone whistling out, and seal it tight. Then he'd staggered to an oxygen flask, turned it on full and got enough air in his lungs to keep from passing out. By the time the others rolled out of bed and came down

to see whether he was alive or dead, pressure was back to normal.

He remembered Hale's white face poked through the open seal-door in the corridor. "What happened, for Pete's sake?"

"Termites," Shoemaker had said.

What a trip, ye gods, what a trip. He'd done some cockeyed things in his life, but this junket a million miles from anywhere took the oscar. And now, if he was going to have the screaming meemies, he wanted to have them in a nice comfortable hospital—not in this watered-down version of a surrealist's nightmare.

Burford was saying something to him. Shoemaker roused himself. "What?"

"I *said,* what's with *you,* Edison? You've been sitting there with a dopey look on your face for half an hour. You haven't heard a word we've been saying, have you?"

Shoemaker made a quick recovery. "I was thinking, bird-brain. That's a little pastime us intellectuals indulge in. I'd teach it to you, but I don't think you'd like it."

Burford looked at him sharply. Shoemaker began to sweat. Was it showing on him already?

Burford said casually, "No offense. Well, think I'll turn in. Big day tomorrow." He strolled out, closing the door behind him.

Shoemaker got up to go a few minutes later, but Davies said, "Say, Jim, there was something I wanted to ask you. I know. Now just what was it? Wait a minute, it'll come back to me. Oh, yes. Jim, do you think—now, you understand, I just want a rough guess on this—do you reckon if we were to use up all the mercury we got, we could scout around and get us some of this sand, or maybe some ore from lower down—"

When he finally got it out, it appeared that he wanted to

know if Shoemaker thought they'd be able to refine some local mineral enough to put it through the transmutator without blowing themselves up.

Exasperated, Shoemaker said, "Sure, easy. It would only take us five or six years to dig up the stuff, build a refinery, get hold of a couple of tons of reagents from Lord knows where, and adjust the trans-M to take the final product. Just a nice little rest-cure, and then we can all go home to glory and show off our long gray beards."

That started the old argument all over again. Davies said, "Now, Jim, don't excite yourself. Don't you see the thing is, if we go home with nothing but some mud and moss that we could have picked up anywhere, or some pictures that we could have faked, why, the Supreme Council will want to know what they spent all that money for. You know we'll get disciplined, sure as—"

Shoemaker's nerves got jumpier by the minute. Finally he said, "Oh, blow it out a porthole!" and slammed the galley door behind him.

He met Burford down the corridor, just turning in to his cubby.

"Where have *you* been?" he demanded.

"Where do you think?" Burford said rudely.

Shoemaker was half undressed when a horrible thought struck him. In his stocking feet, he hurried up to the compartment where his liquor was hidden. The patch was lying propped against the bulkhead; the concealed space was empty. A crowbar lay on the deck, fragments of real solder from other patches clinging to its edge.

Burning, he went back to the engine-room.

Burford had been thorough. The microspectrograph had been carefully pried off and disconnected from the rest of the transmutation rig. Without it, the setup was useless for either

the designer's purpose — making fissionable plutonium — or Shoemaker's — the manufacture of 200-proof happy water.

Shoemaker didn't have to look to know that the spares were gone, too.

Luckily, he had about five quarts of the stuff hidden for emergencies in a canister marked "Hydrochloric Acid" down in the shop. With rationing, it would do. It would have to. Green men or no, he couldn't go dry. He'd been a quart-a-day man for as long as he could remember, and it would take more than a spook or two to scare him off it.

He had to admit to a certain apprehension, though, as he sat on watch in the sallyport the next evening. Land, sea and sky were the same slimy monotone; the occasional breath of wind that came in from the ocean bore the same broad hint of decaying marine life. It had been just about this time last night when that —

Restless, he got up and tramped around the ship. On the seaward side, beyond the huge muzzles of the rocket tubes, the greenish sand sloped downward abruptly in a six-foot embankment to the stagnant edge of the water. There was nothing out there, not even a ripple.

To landward, there was nothing but mud.

He sat down again, looked dubiously at his half-finished quart, decided to let it rest awhile. The glass had a green tinge from the sand around it. Resolutely, he turned his mind to the exploring party, tramping around in that godforsaken wilderness again. Well, what do you think, Shoemaker? he asked himself. How long will it take those supermen to give up their little paper-chase? Two more days? Three? A week? Shoemaker, he answered, I don't know and at this point I don't give a damn. I got more important things to worry about.

That seemed to settle that. He stared gloomily at the bottle, then picked it up and drank.

When he lowered the bottle again, pushing the cap shut with his thumb, the little green man was there.

No, it was a different one this time. Rigid with shock, he could still see that this one was fatter around the middle and had shorter whiskers.

But the expression was the same. Like a fiend on his way to a dismemberment party.

He found his voice. "Where did you come from?"

The little man smiled unpleasantly. "Mud and moss," he said.

Shoemaker wanted to yell. Holding a conversation with a hunk of mist, a nonexistent goblin! He hardly recognized his own voice when he said, "What do you want?"

The green man walked toward him. "Heaved out my Scotch," he said, and leered.

Shoemaker did yell. Leaping to his feet, flinging his arms wide, he bellowed like a wounded carabao. The bottle slipped out of his fingers and looped gracefully into the sea. The goblin turned his head to follow it.

Then, astonishingly, he looked at Shoemaker, said, "It'll come back," and dived in after the bottle.

Neither of them came up, though Shoemaker hung onto the frame of the sallyport and watched for half an hour.

Shoemaker heard their voices through the hull when they came back that night.

"Where's the old soak?" That was Burford.

"Now, Charley, that isn't nice. He didn't say anything, but you could tell he wasn't feeling so good when he found out you'd located his cache. I dunno's we should of done that. He's sure to get real uncooperative on us, and we need him."

"All right!" said Burford. "But have you noticed how shaky he's been the last couple of days? What if he cracks up, then where'll we be? I say it isn't enough to just throw out his liquor—he'll make more as soon as we get into space again. We ought to make him take the cure. Force it down his throat if we have to."

"Sure," said Hale. "Just tell him we're through kidding around. He's got to take it and like it."

"Now, boys, take it easy," Davies said. "We've been all over this before...."

Shoemaker grinned sourly. So that was what they were cooking up. Well, forewarned was forearmed; as a matter of fact, he'd given this possibility some thought a long time ago, and acted accordingly. So he had one hole card, anyway. But getting them to agree to an immediate takeoff was another horse.

Wait a minute...There was an idea. If he played it right—it was tricky, but it might work.

They were coming in the sallyport now. Shoemaker ducked down to the chem storeroom, found the bottle he was looking for and filled a small capsule from it. His hands were shaking, he noticed. That was what the fear of hellfire did to you.

Shoemaker had reached a decision. Delirium tremens wasn't a good enough answer; it didn't fit. If he thought it was that, he'd gladly take the cure, even though the idea made his belly crawl. Of course, it was too late for that, anyway—he'd thrown out the drug in Burford's sick-box and substituted plain baking soda long ago.

But Shoemaker thought he knew what was happening to him, and it wasn't d.t.'s. It wasn't the usual dipso's collection of crazy daymares at all; there was a horrid kind of logic to it. Instead of delirium, it was—judgment.

That was as far as he'd gone. He knew he had it coming to him, and now he thought he was going to get it. But he hadn't given up yet. There was one thing he could still do, and that was to run—get clear away from this damned planet. After that, he'd just have to take his chances. Maybe the things could follow him into space, maybe not. Shoemaker wasn't sure of anything any more.

He slipped the capsule into his pocket where he could get at it when he needed it, and went on up the passageway.

"Oh, there you are," said Burford. "We were wondering where you'd got to."

Shoemaker glared at him. "Okay, go ahead, ask me if I was digging for a microspectrograph mine."

Burford looked shocked. "Why, Jim, you know I wouldn't say a nasty thing like that." He took Shoemaker's arm. "Come on up to the galley. We're having a pow-wow."

Oh-oh, thought Shoemaker. This looks like it. He put his hand in his pocket and folded his handkerchief over the capsule.

Davies and Hale stared at him solemnly as he came through the door with Burford behind him. He looked back at them, poker-faced, and sat down.

Davies cleared his throat. "Er-um. Jim, we've been worried about you lately. You don't act like you're feeling too chipper."

"That's right," said Shoemaker, looking doleful. "I've been thinking about my poor old mother."

Burford snorted. "Your poor old mother died fifty years ago."

"She did," said Shoemaker, taking out his handkerchief, "and she died with one great wish unfulfilled."

"Yeah? What was that?" Burford asked skeptically.

"She always wanted to have a son like you," Shoemaker

said, "so that she could whale the living daylights out of him." He blew his nose raucously, slipped the capsule into his mouth, put his handkerchief away and smiled beatifically.

Davies was frowning. "Jim," he said, "I wish you wouldn't make jokes about it. We all know what's the matter with you. You been fightin' the liquor too hard."

"Who says so?" Shoemaker demanded.

"Now, Jim, don't make things difficult. I don't like this any more'n you do, but—"

"Like what?"

Burford made an impatient gesture. "Go ahead, tell him, Lou. No use dragging it out."

"That's right," Hale put in, glowering.

"Shut up, you," said Shoemaker. He turned to Davies. "Tell me what? You're not going to bring up that 'cure' chestnut again, by any chance?"

Davies looked uncomfortable. "I'm sorry, Jim. I know you don't want to take it. I argued against it, but the boys finally convinced me. You know, Jim, if it was only you that we had to think about, I wouldn't try to make you do anything you didn't want to. But, don't you see, this is it—either we all stick together or we're sunk. If we don't all keep in good shape and able to do our jobs, why...well, you see, don't you, Jim—"

"What he means," said Burford, "is that this time you're going to take the cure, whether you want to or not."

Shoemaker got up and put his chair very carefully out of the way.

"Let's see you make me," he said.

It had to look good, so when Burford grabbed for him he stepped back and swung a hearty right into the middle of Burford's face.

Burford staggered, but kept on coming. He clipped Shoemaker's jaw glancingly, swung again and missed, then gave him a beauty in the eye.

Shoemaker aimed for the midriff and got it. "Uff!" said Burford. Then Hale tackled him from behind and the three of them were all over him.

Shoemaker writhed, kicking, biting, and using his elbows, but every time he tore loose they brought him down again. After a while he was beginning to wonder if he could get away even if he really meant it. Then, somehow, Davies got a half Nelson on him and bore down. Shoemaker decided it was time to quit.

He looked at his opponents. Burford had a black eye and several assorted contusions, Hale a puffed and bleeding cheek. He couldn't see Davies' face, but the pants-leg stretched out beside his own was ripped and hanging down over the boot, revealing a hairy thigh. Shoemaker felt pretty good.

"Whuff," said Burford, gazing at him with a new respect. He got up carefully, walked over to the sick-box and came back with a box of powders and a glass of water.

He knelt. Shoemaker glared at him. Burford said, "Okay, baby, open your mouth or we'll pry it open. Hold his head, Lou." Davies' big hand clasped Shoemaker's skull, and Burford pried at his lower jaw. The instant his lips parted, Burford tilted the powder into his mouth, then pushed it shut again. Shoemaker's eyes bulged. "Swallow," said Burford remorselessly, and grabbed Shoemaker's nose between a horny finger and thumb.

Shoemaker swallowed. "Now you get the water," Burford said, and held the glass to his lips. Shoemaker drank, meekly.

Burford stood up. "Well," he said uncertainly, "that's

that." Davies let go of Shoemaker and eased out from under him. Then he stood beside Burford and Hale, and all three looked down at Shoemaker.

There were real tears in Shoemaker's eyes—from having his nose pinched in Burford's vise-like grip—and his face looked drawn. Slowly, like an old man, he got to his feet, walked to the table and sat down.

"Now, Jim," Davies began hesitantly, "don't take on. It isn't so bad. You'll be a better man for it, you know. You'll prob'ly gain weight and everything. Now, Jim—"

Shoemaker wasn't listening. His eyes were rigid and glassy, his jaw lax. Slowly he began to tremble. He slumped over and hit the deck with a thud, still jerking.

"Good Lord!" exploded Burford.

"What is it?" Hale demanded.

"Mitchel's reaction," said Burford. "Hasn't happened twice in thirty years. I never thought—"

"Is it dangerous, Charley?"

"Lord, yes. Wait till I get the handbook." Shoemaker heard his quick steps, then pages being riffled.

When he thought it was safe, Shoemaker sneaked a look out of one eye. The other two men were pressed close to Burford, staring over his shoulders. Their backs were to him, but he kept jerking his body occasionally anyway, just to be on the safe side.

"Treatment," said Burford hoarsely, "extended rest on soft diet, diathermy, u.v. irradiation, hourly injection of—Hell, we can't do that. We haven't got half the stuff."

"What happens if he don't get it, Charley?" said Davies nervously. "I mean to say, how long—"

Burford flipped pages. "General debility, progressing rapidly, followed by heart stoppage and death after four to ten weeks."

"Oh, my," said Davies. "What'll we do, Charley? I mean—"

"Wait a minute, here. Are you sure he's got what you think?" asked Hale skeptically. "How do you know he's not faking?"

"Faking!" said Burford. "Well—he's got all the symptoms." He riffled pages. "Immediate unconsciousness, violent tremors—oh-oh. Look at this."

The two heads craned forward eagerly. There was a moment of silence, and then Hale giggled. "Well, if he does *that,* I'll believe you!"

"Yes," said Davies seriously, "but, if he's unconscious, how can he—"

Burford glanced at the handbook again. "He should be coming to any time now," he said loudly. "When he does, we'll know for sure."

Shoemaker grinned to himself. He knew that section of the Medical Handbook by heart. *Patient remains unconscious and cannot be roused for twenty minutes to one-half hour....* He kept his eyes closed and waited, jerking occasionally, for what he judged was a good twenty minutes, then another five for good measure. When he opened them again, he saw Davies' anxious face a few inches away, flanked by Burford's and Hale's.

"He's coming out of it!" said Burford. "How do you feel, old man?"

"Wha—?" said Shoemaker.

"You've had a little stroke," said Burford mendaciously. "Help me get him up... You'll be all right, Jim, but you've got to do just as we tell you."

"Poisoned me," Shoemaker gasped, suffering himself to be hoisted limply erect.

"No, no," Davies protested. "We're trying to help you, Jimmy boy. Just go with Charley, that's right. Here, take this bottle, Charley."

Even Shoemaker was a little startled by what followed.

When they returned, Burford nodded solemnly. "It was blue, all right," he said.

"Poisoned me!" said Shoemaker, allowing himself to speak a little more emphatically.

"Oh, hell!" said Burford, lifting Shoemaker's quaking body into a chair. "So we poisoned you. We didn't mean to do it. Question is now, what's to be done?"

"Why, we've got to get him to a hospital," said Davies. "Got to start back to Earth immediately. Uh — but, Charley, will he be well enough to work on the trip?"

"It *might* not kill him," said Burford grimly. But what about us? Are we going to go back empty-handed?"

"Oh, my," said Davies. "I forgot for a minute. No, we *can't* do that. But look here, Charley — if he dies while we're still here, how're we going to get back without him?"

"We'll have to, that's all," said Burford.

"Check," said Hale.

"Well, I got to admit you boys are right," said Davies promptly, with a long face. "Never had to make a more difficult decision in my life. Poor old Jim! When I think — "

He stopped with a gasp as Shoemaker rose to his feet, swelling visibly with rage. "When *I* think," said Shoemaker loudly, "of the chances I've had" — he found himself encumbered by the broken halves of the capsule under his tongue, and spat them out violently — "to strangle the whole murdering crew of you quietly in your sleep — " His fingers curled. He started toward Davies slowly, on stiff legs.

Burford was staring at the capsule-halves on the deck. Suddenly he bent and picked them up, saw the faint blue

stain that clung to their edges. Light broke over his face. "Methylene blue!" he said. "You knew—you hid this in your mouth and swallowed it. Why, you old—"

"I did," said Shoemaker, "and now I'm going to make *you* swallow it." He stepped forward and swung a vigorous right that knocked Burford through the open door.

Hale picked up a chair. Shoemaker ducked aside as it whooshed down, meanwhile kicking Hale in the stomach. Then he looked around for Davies, but the latter, it seemed, was behind him. Something tapped Shoemaker on the back of the skull, and then everything faded away in gray mist....

The mist lifted once, while, with a throbbing head, he listened to Burford explaining that everything on the ship that could possibly be a weapon was locked up; that if he attempted any more reactionary violence they would as soon leave him dead on Venus as not; and that if he knew what was good for him, he would behave himself both before the takeoff—which would occur when they pleased—and after it.

He tried to tell Burford what he could do with himself, but fell asleep again before he was half through.

When he woke, finally, it was evening, and low voices from the galley forward told him that the other three had returned from another day of hunting. He got up, feeling stiff and heavy, and prowled disconsolately down the passageway as far as his shop door, which was, indeed, locked. He was hungry, but he had a feeling that the sight of any one of the other three human faces on Venus would take away his appetite. For lack of anything better to do, he stepped into the airlock, closed the inner door quietly behind him, and sat down morosely in the sallyport.

Sky and sea were dull blue-green, without star or horizon.

There was a stink of sulphur, and then a stink of fish, and then another stink of sulphur.... He sat and sweated, thinking his gloomy thoughts.

Shoemaker was not a moral man, but the sense of personal doom was strong upon him. Suppose there really were a Hell, he thought, only the preachers were wrong about everything but the heat.... A splitting skull... *No* liquor... *No* women... A stinking, slime-blue seascape that was the same right-side up, upside-down, or crossways...And the little green men. He had almost forgotten them.

When he looked up, he remembered.

The third little man was slimmer, and had no whiskers at all. He carried a shiny golden dagger, almost as big as himself. He was walking forward purposefully.

Shoemaker waited, paralyzed.

The little man fixed him with his gleaming eye. "We're through kidding around," he said grimly. "Question is now!"

And he laid the golden dagger in Shoemaker's quaking palm.

Shoemaker's first impulse was to cut his own throat. His second was to throw the dagger as far away as possible. Those two came in flashing tenths of a second. The third was stronger. He rose effortlessly into the air, landed facing the sallyport, and, mouth wide open but emitting no sound, ran straight through it. He passed the closed inner door more by a process of ignoring it than by bursting it open.

Directly opposite was the door of Burford's cubby, now open just far enough to show Burford's startled face. When he saw Shoemaker, he tried hastily to shut the door, but Shoemaker by now had so much momentum as to have reached, for practical purposes, the status of an irresistible force. In the next second, he came to a full stop; but this was only because he was jammed against Burford, who was

jammed against the far wall of the room, which was braced by five hundred tons of metal.

"Ugg," said Burford. "Whuff—where did you get that *knife?"*

"Shut up and start talking," said Shoemaker wildly. "Where's the microspectrograph?"

Burford opened his mouth to yell. Shoemaker shut it with a fist, meanwhile thrusting the knife firmly against Burford's midriff to illustrate the point.

Burford spat out a tooth. As Shoemaker put a little more pressure on the blade, he said hastily, "It's in the—uhh!—fuel reservoir."

Shoemaker whirled him around and propelled him into the corridor, after a quick look to make sure that the way was clear. They proceeded to the engine room, in this order: Burford, knife, Shoemaker.

Without waiting to be persuaded, Burford produced a ring of keys, unlocked the reservoir, and withdrew the microspectrograph. "Hook it up," said Shoemaker. Burford did so.

"Uhh," said Burford. "Now what—whiskey?"

"Nope," said Shoemaker incautiously. "We're taking off."

Burford's eyes bulged. He made a whoofling noise and then, without warning, lunged forward, grabbing Shoemaker's knife arm with one hand and punching him with the other. They rolled on the deck.

Shoemaker noticed that Burford's mouth was open again, and he put his hand into it, being too busy keeping away from Burford's knee to take more effective measures. Burford bit a chunk out of the hand and shouted, "Hale! Davies! Help!"

There were bangings in the corridor. Shoemaker decided the knife was more of a hindrance than a help, and dropped it. When Burford let go to reach for it, he managed to roll

them both away, at the same time getting a good two-handed grip on Burford's skinny throat. This maneuver had the disadvantage of putting Burford on top, but Shoemaker solved the problem by lifting him bodily and banging his skull against the nearby bulkhead.

Burford sagged. Shoemaker pushed him out of the way and got up, just in time to be knocked down hard by Hale's chunky body.

"Old idiot," panted Hale, "oof! Help me, Davies!"

Shoemaker got an ear between his teeth, and was rewarded by a bloodcurdling scream from Hale. Davies was hopping ponderously around in the background, saying, "Boys, stop it! Oh, my—the guns are all locked up. Charley, give me the keys!"

Shoemaker pulled himself loose from Hale, sprang up, and was immediately pulled down again. Burford, who was getting dizzily to his feet, tripped over Shoemaker's head and added himself to the tangle. Shoemaker got a scissors on him and then devoted himself to the twin problems of avoiding Burford's wildly threshing heels and keeping Hale away from his throat. Suddenly inspired, he solved both by bending Burford's body upward so that the latter's booted feet, on their next swing, struck Hale squarely in the middle of his fat face.

At this point he noticed that Davies was standing nearby with one foot raised. He grasped the foot and pushed. Davies hit the deck with a satisfying clang.

Shoemaker got up for the third time and looked around for the dagger, but it had been kicked out of sight. He paused, wondering whom to hit next, and in the interval all three of his opponents scrambled up and came at him.

Shoemaker thought, this is it. He spat on his fist for luck and hit Burford a beauty on the chin. Burford fell down, and,

astonishingly, got up again. A little disheartened, Shoemaker took two blows in the face from Hale before he knocked the little man into a far corner. *Hale* got up again. Shoemaker, who had been aware for some time that someone was pummeling his back, turned around unhappily and knocked Davies down. Davies, at any rate, stayed down.

Burford, whose face was puffy, and Hale, who was bleeding from assorted cuts, came toward him. Hale, he saw, had the dagger in his hand. Shoemaker stepped back, picked up the unconscious Davies by collar and belt, and slung him across the deck. This time both men went down (Hale with a soggy *bloomp*), and stayed there. The dagger skidded out of Hale's hand and came to rest at Shoemaker's feet.

He picked it up, knelt at a convenient distance to cut off Hale's and Burford's noses, and threatened to do just that. Burford intimated that he would do as he was told. Hale said nothing, but the expression on his face was enough.

Satisfied, Shoemaker opened a locker with Burford's keys, got a coil of insulated wire and tied up Davies and Hale, after which, with Burford's help, he strapped them into their acceleration hammocks.

Burford was acting a little vague. Shoemaker slapped him around until he looked alive, then set him to punching calculator keys. After a few minutes of this, Burford looked as if he wanted to say something.

"Well, spit it out," said Shoemaker, waving the golden knife.

"You'll get yours," said Burford, looking scared but stubborn. "When we get back to New York—"

"South Africa," corrected Shoemaker, "where the Supreme Council can't ask us any questions."

Burford looked surprised, then said it was a good idea.

It was, too.

The lone star winked out in the blue-green heavens, and the winds of its passing died away. The throng of little rabbit-eared green men, floating on their placid ocean, gazed after it long after it had disappeared.

"What do *you* think?" said the slim one without whiskers. "Did they like us?"

The one addressed was yards away, but his long ears heard the question plainly. "Can't say," he answered. "They acted so *funny*. When we spoke to that one in their own language, so as to make him feel at home—"

"Yes," said a third, almost invisible in the mist. "Was that the right thing to do, d'you suppose? Are you *sure* you got the words right, that last time?"

"Sure," said the first, confidently. "I was right next to the ship all evening, and I memorized everything they said..."

They considered that for a while, sipping from their flasks. Other voices piped up: "Maybe we should have talked to them when they were all together?"

"Nooo. They were so *big*. That one was much the nicest, anyway."

"He took our present."

"Yes," said the slim one, summing it up. "They must have liked us all right. After all, they gave us *this*"—swinging his flask to make a pleasant gurgle of 150-proof grain alcohol. "That proves it!"

Burp!

WHO IS DAMON KNIGHT?

Paul Payne, the editor of Planet Stories *that year, asked me for a biographical sketch to go along with "The Third Little Green Man," and I wrote the following. Payne cleaned it up a little (the Turkish bath was his idea; I had written simply "I get most of my ideas at stool"), and put my name at the end of it in order to keep* Planet*'s earnest readers from thinking that the magazine was actually inviting me to drop dead.*

Who is Damon Knight? Thousands of people are asking this question, and getting no answers. Now, for the first time, PS brings you an exclusive, uncensored interview with Knight the Man.

"I get most of my ideas in an abandoned Turkish bath in Brooklyn," said Knight, flicking the ash from his cigar carelessly into his gray Persian. "I believe nothing so resembles the fissionating chamber of a space ship as the awful emptiness of the steam room in this establishment—so dark, so full of nozzles..." He waved an expressive hand.

"Furthermore, I happen to know the place is haunted—by me."

Knight was born, twenty-four years ago, in a hovel on the outskirts of Hill City, Kansas. He does not remember his mother, except when he needs money. In a long and crowded career, he has been stevedore, gold miner, undertaker, lightning-rod inspector, department store executive, sniper, shoe salesman, zoo inmate, confidential secretary, coke sacker, rat farmer and deep-sea diver—*but he has never been a writer.*

"I happen to own fifty million monkeys," he explains casually.

Asked to interpret the condition of the stock market or answer three personal questions, Knight replies without having to take time to think. Those privileged to listen to him hang on every word, for every one is an original contribution to the English language. He is spoken of admiringly by English professors as the possessor of the largest Urdu vocabulary in America.

He tells his friends, "Never get disheartened when things seem to be against you. In actuality, they are."

Knight lives simply, with his child and three wives, in a tiny corner of Gimbel's sub-basement. Here he writes his famous monographs on various aspects of cacography, enlarges his collection of sock-stretchers, smokes corn-silk cigarettes, and signs his name to such masterpieces of science-fiction as this issue's *Mystery of the Blue Glue.* About this story, Knight says, "About this story I can say nothing."

To editors he is coldly polite; to bill collectors, effusive; to his wives, nauseating. Raconteur, man-about-town, *idiot savant,* he is indeed worthy of his place in science-fiction's Hall of Celebrities. And so we say, Good luck to you, Damon Knight! Drop dead!

DEFINITION

Man, *n.* A pentagonal, dipolar, monoplane dominant, of intelligence 96, native of district 10039817. Unabsorbed.

It is a truism that a human being can get used to very nearly everything. The hardy Eskimo, lying belly-down on a plain of ice that stretched unbroken to the sky, probably spent little of his time in meditating upon the vastness and inscrutability of the Universe... he was thinking of his dinner. And Charles Samson, seven hundred years later, looked past his long nose at a scene of equal majesty — our galaxy, viewed from a ship in mid-arc — in a similar frame of mind.

It was approximately sixteen hours, galactic time; a trifle later according to Samson's stomach. He had played a vicious game of handball with his wife an hour and a half before, and now he was hungry.

The Eskimo, although a patient man, might have reflected that it was unreasonable of this particular seal to wake up and look around him at this precise moment. Samson, equally virtuous, told himself that his wife might have chosen

a more opportune time to experiment with her cookery. Midge had conceived an idea for a soufflé such as had never before been seen by Man, and had accordingly been adding new circuits to the autochef for the past eighty-five minutes.

If she ran to form, the soufflé—which would be a triumph, in spite of seventeen separate miscalculations—would be served in about twenty minutes more. Samson would have preferred an artless slab of steak *now*.

These, it may be considered, were picayune thoughts to occupy a brain which had been interminably trained and tested, stocked with a fabulous assortment of knowledge, and then sent out, with one other human mind for company, to patrol a hegemony ten billion times as vast as Caesar's.

At the moment, however, there was nothing world-shaking for it to do. Charles and Midge, like a thousand other teams of trouble-shooters assigned to the volume of space known as Slice 103, earned their pay by intense, difficult, and sometimes dangerous labor which averaged three months out of the year; the rest of their time was spent in traveling from one assignment to the next, or simply in drifting, waiting for something of importance to turn up.

Two days ago, for example, they had been halfway along a leisurely arc between the Hilkert system and the observatory settlement on de Broglie II, when slice H.Q. had buzzed them and told them to change course for Kenilworth IV—an isolated and obscure one-man post out on the perimeter of the Slice. Tomorrow, as likely as not, another message would inform them that the trouble, whatever it was, had simmered down. Then they would blast into a new arc, and it would be six days, at least—even if another wild-goose chase did not intervene—before they touched ground. Meanwhile, they amused themselves as well as they could....

As for the stars, which lay spread out to infinity beyond the inch-thick vitrin of the ship's veranda window, the trouble with them was that they were always the same. Maugham records that when he first saw the Taj Mahal, he felt an ineffable surprise and joy; but on the following day, it was only a beautiful building. He had seen it before.

Samson had been in space for something over half his lifetime. Accordingly, when the communicator bell rang, it shattered no meditations on the relations of Man to Nature; on the contrary, Samson, uncoiling himself and walking through the doorway into the lounge, carried with him the firm mental image of a ham sandwich, with relish and mustard.

"Let's hear it," he said.

Obediently, the communicator uncorked a quiet male voice: "Harlow calling the Samsons. Acknowledge if you're awake, will you? Over."

Midge appeared at the opposite end of the room, brushing a strand of black hair back from her forehead. "We read you, Harlow," said Samson. "Go ahead. Over." The light-tube which encircled the ceiling, having turned pink at Harlow's "Over," glowed spectrum-white again at Samson's, indicating that the communicator was ready to receive.

"Something?" said Midge, coming forward.

Samson waved his hand at her, palm down, in a gesture that meant "Shut up and listen." Simultaneously, Harlow's voice began again: "I'll give you the story, anyhow; you can pick it up from the cube later if you're not reading me now. Kids, this Kenilworth thing is a lot bigger than it looked two days ago. It may be even bigger than I think it is now, in which case we'll all have to start digging hidey-holes. It's all yours — I haven't got anybody else within two weeks' run of the place. So listen."

There was a pause and a click, which Samson identified as the sound of Harlow's teeth gripping his ever-present pipe. Then, "Here's the call I got from Jackson, the Kenilworth deputy. That was three days ago. I don't think there's anything in it that I missed, but I'll let you decide that. It came in at three-oh-five hours G.T."

A younger voice said excitedly, "Jackson, Kenilworth IV, calling Harlow, Slice 103 H.Q. Urgent. Harlow, hold on to your hair. *The Kassids are back.* Over to you."

Harlow's recorded voice, sounding sleepy, answered: "Better hold onto yours. Who are the Kassids, and what if they're back? I didn't even know they were gone. Over."

"Who are the Kassids! Just the big medicine men of Slices 42, 43, 102 and 103, is all! See your manual, page 9581 *et seq.* They landed on KenilFour ten days ago; I just got the message. It seems the local boys told them about me as soon as they got past the language difficulty and they're anxious to meet me. I'm going over there now—call you back in six hours. Over,"

"Give them a big, juicy kiss for me," said Harlow. "Clearing."

His voice began again immediately: "You can look up the Kassids in the manual; I had to. They're a legend, a group of legends, fifteen thousand years old. At that point, my opinion was either that a gang of backwoods Messiahs were passing themselves off as 'Kassids' in hopes of gain and glory; or else that some of Jackson's charges were playing a big fat joke on him. So I rolled over and went back to sleep. The only thing is, Jackson never called back.

"I waited twenty-four hours and then alerted you. It still didn't look big. Jackson might have crash-landed somewhere and broken his leg. Or he might have got hold of some local antiquities and forgotten to eat, sleep, breathe or say his

prayers. Nothing else happened until several hours ago. Then this came in, from an experimental organics outfit on Loblich VII."

The Samsons listened to a high, exasperated voice complaining that a maniac named Jackson had landed at the station, 'preached a kind of a sermon,' and taken off again with seventeen of the group's twenty-two members. The group was now hopelessly undermanned; eight years' work would be ruined unless H.Q. sent them trained replacements sooner than immediately.

Harlow demanded more information. What had Jackson's 'sermon' consisted of, exactly?

"He talked about Love," said the organics man irritably. "And Peace—and a Message for the Universe. Stuff like that. If you ask me, the man's insane. And if you want to know why three-quarters of this outfit dumped their work and walked out with him, don't ask me. When do we get those replacements?"

There was another pause, punctuated by the click of pipestem against teeth. "Now that," said Harlow, "began to seem a little smelly. If you'll look at the tank, you'll see that Loblich is the nearest human settlement to Kenilworth, and it's a long jump—Jackson must have blasted at maximum to get there in two and a half days. But from Loblich to any of three well-settled systems is just a hop.

"So I got the signal pattern of Jackson's ship out of the files and had a warning broadcast to all the patrol centers in 103 and adjoining Slices. I also started a call going out to Jackson at twenty-minute intervals. He didn't answer it. That was all, until fifteen minutes ago.

"Jackson turned up in a landing orbit around Xavier III. The local patrol put a beam on him and warned him not

to land. But instead of shunting into a parking orbit and waiting for instructions, as he was told, Jackson headed for open space under full drive.

"The patrol burned him out of the sky. There was nothing left to pick up."

This time the pause was longer. "If he had landed," Harlow's tired voice said finally, "and if he'd got anything like the same percentage of response in a larger group, this thing would already be too big to stop. I tell myself that." The Samsons could hear his teeth grating against the pipestem. "All right, that's all I can give you," he said after a moment. "Land on KenilFour, get in touch with these Kassids, talk to them and find out what this is all about and how they do it. I've got two cruisers and a battleship on the way from the naval station in Kleinmuller, and if it turns out that they'll do any good, they'll be there in fifteen days. But we've got to have more information. And just incidentally, don't let them sell you whatever they sold Jackson. If you do, I can't offer you any guarantee you won't end up the way he did." There was a thump, and then a gargling noise that meant Harlow was sucking on an empty pipe. "Take every precaution you can think of," he finished. "Keep in continuous touch after you land. Over."

"Check, Papa," said Samson. "Clearing."

Samson, who was tall, beefy and blond, looked at Midge, dark and apparently fragile, who was curled into a very small ball among the cushions on the other side of the room. "Did you know Jackson?" he asked.

She nodded soberly. "A very good boy," she said.

"M-hm. You got that manual?"

"Here." She put the cube into the reader set into the table in front of her, and began scanning for page 9581. Samson walked over and sat beside her.

There was a good deal about the Kassids, also known as the Akassa, the Ksits, the Karsis, the Krassit, the Karss and the Krathis. All the older races in this section of the galaxy had legends about them. It was not particularly surprising that Harlow had had to look them up; they were just one item among the tangled mass of folk-legend and myth that had been gleaned from a thousand inhabited worlds.

Nobody, said the manual, knew whether the Kassids had been a historical culture or a widespread myth. They were magicians, or demigods, or, as Jackson had put it, big medicine men, they were purer and nobler than anybody else, they knew more about everything, they could change their shapes at will, et cetera. The fact that more than five hundred planets had the same or similar legends proved nothing, because all the races in question, dull as they were, had had limited interstellar travel millennia before the arrival of Man. Most of the legends agreed that the Kassids had gone away, amid weeping and wailing from the lesser tribes, some fifteen thousand years ago.

But now they were back — and something they had done to Jackson had made him leave his post, and caused seventeen other people to leave theirs, and had got them all killed.

"I won't say I like it much," Midge said. "How are you fixed for ideas?"

"Information first," said Samson didactically, "ideas after." He added, not to Midge, "Take a message."

The light-tube glowed pink.

"Charles Samson to Head Librarian, Lubyanka Central Archives. Urgent. Request all material on the Kassids, K-A-S-S-I-D-S. Don't digest it — put it straight through on facsimile. Over to you."

He clipped a fresh cube into the receiver in the center of the room. After twenty minutes, a female voice said, "Information coming through. Over." The recording light glowed; Samson turned on the reader and glanced at the page of type that appeared on the screen. "I read you. Thanks. Clearing."

"Coffee, chief," said Midge resignedly. "And two ham sandwiches." She came over and sat beside Samson. "Hold that page till I finish it."

Samson was a man with an open mind, a faculty which served him well in dealing with the weird and wild inhabitants of many planets in Slice 103, but which, it occurred to him, was not just the thing wanted for the task in hand. He kept his misgivings to himself, however, and aided by numerous steaming pots of coffee served up by the ship's autochef, bored his way determinedly through the twenty tubes of surmise, conjecture and hearsay provided by Lubyanka Archives. Midge, who had a female-superiority complex, sat and took it alongside him, cube for cube.

When they had finished, as Midge took the trouble to remind him, they had learned next to nothing that wasn't in the Slice 103 manual. "A total loss, wasn't it?" she demanded.

"Sure. Just a precaution; there *might* have been something in there that the manual skipped. If it doesn't rain one Sunday, do you give up wearing waterproofs?"

Midge's expression indicated that the question deserved no answer. "You've had your information—*now* have you got any ideas?"

"Well," said Samson reflectively, "Harlow seems to think there's some kind of compulsion involved, maybe hypnotic. I don't see how we can exclude the possibility, even though

that kind of contact between alien minds is supposed to be impossible. But I've got a hunch that's not it. I think maybe they simply talked to Jackson—they *convinced* him—and he did the same to the seventeen that followed him."

"In my own fumbling way," said Midge, "I got that far three hours ago. Because if it was compulsion of any kind, why did it only work on seventeen out of twenty-two? I even made a stab at answering another little technical question—why didn't Jackson use the communicator?"

"That's easy enough," said Samson. "If you got a call from somebody you didn't know, and he started spouting pseudo-religious propaganda at you, would you listen quietly until he was finished, or would you cut him off and complain to the Privacy Commission? And if he'd called anybody who knew him—you or Harlow, for example—we would have smelled something. Jackson might have found himself cut off before he ever left Kenilworth, if he'd tried that. He couldn't take that chance."

"But if you don't mind," Midge said coolly, "what I meant by my question was, have you got any ideas about what we're going to do?"

"Sure. I'll go in there doped to the eyebrows. I'll use—"

"Wait," said Midge. "Please. You said, 'I'll go in?'"

"That's right. I go in; you stay in the ship and watch. You also listen, but through a whisper mike—you'll hear everything I say but not what the other fellow says. In other words, I go over the cliff, you hold my legs. Catch on?"

Midge said nothing.

"As I was saying, I'll use antihypnotics, and you might as well give me a good dose of countersuggestion, too, but those are just playing it safe. What I'm counting on to do the stunt is arnophrene."

"Arnophrene!" Midge stared at him.

"Sure. In heavy dosage, the stuff inhibits your ability to add two and two. You can follow an argument, in pieces, and even make reasonably intelligent replies, but you can't hang onto it long enough to put it all together. In other words, if they convince me of anything, it'll be on the order of 'Your nose is on the front of your face'... I'll be sick as a dog afterwards, of course, and I may not remember much of what they feed me. But you can hold my head, and drag the information out of me under hypno if you have to. Remember to be careful what you ask for, in that case — we want to know who these people are and what they're up to, not what they think about the Great Spirit."

Midge kept looking at him somberly. "I don't like it," she said.

"I don't like it either. Neither will Harlow, if he has to get me burned down for trying to save souls... although, come to think of it, I can think of ways to play it smarter than Jackson did. Make a phony report, duck out somewhere along the line between here and H.Q., and then find me a nice uninhabited planet to hide on for a while. Pirate another ship later, maybe wear a false beard." He sighed. "But come to think of it again, I guess all that has occurred to Harlow, too."

He looked at Midge. "What'll you do if I should get sold before you can yank me out of there?"

Her eyes were steadier than her husband's. "Follow you down and buy myself a tambourine," she said. "What did you think?"

Midge's small hands were painfully tight on the edge of the control panel. On the screen before her, reproduced with excellent fidelity in spite of the transmitter's peanut size, appeared whatever Samson was seeing: at the moment, the interior of a bronze-green room and two of the roly-poly,

stumpy-legged tentacled autochthons of Kenilworth IV. She could see Samson's hands, whenever he happened to raise them; she could not see his face.

On a smaller screen to the left was a view from a pickup in the ship's hull—a grassy plain, seen from above, with a huge, black, lozenge-shaped spaceship and a cluster of the little KenilFour aircars.

Samson's voice remarked, "They say the Kassid is coming now."

Midge wanted to say something encouraging and affectionate, but her voice stuck in her throat.

After a moment, a doorway dilated at the end of the pictured room and something hopped in. For the benefit of the listening Harlow at H.Q., Midge began to describe it. "About a meter and a half tall—must be an oxygen breather, I can't see any mask—it's a uniped. Moves partly by hopping, partly by contracting its foot. Rather thick trunk and four limbs besides the foot, two at the very top, two where the trunk joins the leg. A lot of flabby fingers, can't tell how many. Three eyes in a horizontal line, vertical mouth under them. No clothes. Whole thing a dull tan color, with dark pa—"

She broke off, as Samson began to speak. He was evidently replying to the Kassid's speech of welcome. "I'm very happy to be here. My people have heard great things of you from your pupil, David Jackson."

Another long pause, during which Midge said, "Dark patches, apparently at random—no pattern. I would guess the thing to be recently evolved from an undersea stage, tail altered to a foot. Don't know whether there are any exterior organs on the other side—there, it turned around for a minute. No organs. Now the KenilFours are leaving...."

Samson said, "That's why I came."

Another pause, and then, "Yes, thank you." Something that ran on a great many thin, twinkling legs brought in a low stool and ran out again. The interview went on, a meaningless sequence of short questions and comments by Samson, each followed by a long silence. "Yes, of course, that's true."..."I see"..."How clear that is now"..."But in the case of war"... After a while, Samson's speech began to grow a little thick. He stumbled over occasional words, but always recovered.

After a long time, Samson said, "The word will be spread. My government will want to know about your needs and your history, so that we can receive you properly. Will you show me through your ship, and tell me something about yourselves?" The view turned toward the doorway, approached it and went through into a long corridor.

Midge closed the sending circuit between herself and Samson. "Charlie, are you all right?" she whispered. If he was acting, she told herself miserably, it was a magnificent performance. Under the fuzziness of his speech was something else... an awe, a quiet joy.

"All right, Midge," said Samson's voice quietly, naturally. "Don't worry."

A long succession of rooms: control chamber, power plant, a garden with plants unlike any that Midge had seen before, star charts, transparent tanks full of murky fluid... Samson's hand, and a narrow strip of something being put into it. Patterns of dots on the strip. Samson's voice: "What does it mean?" Then more corridors, more rooms. Finally Samson's voice again, weak and hollow. "Feeling rocky, Midge. Coming out."

It was Harlow's voice asking, "How is he now?" The "now" was an irony, since even at second-order speeds, his

voice had taken fourteen minutes to reach them, and he would not hear the answer for another fourteen.

Samson, in orange pajamas, very pale, said, "Ready to talk, Papa." He looked at the ceiling. "Don't think I need the hypno. I can remember most of it. Fuzzy—a dreamlike quality to it—but I think it's almost all there."

"I've already had you under hypno," said Midge quietly. "As soon as I got you inside."

Samson turned his head to look at her. "So? What for?"

"I wanted to find out if you'd had your soul saved."

Samson grinned weakly. "Is it likely? Harlow—get this. The Kassids aren't invaders in the usual meaning of the term. They haven't got any mind-rays or insidious hypnotic powers, and they aren't interested in taking over anybody's property. That's the first thing. Second, they're not a race and they're not an empire. I saw at least twenty different life-forms aboard their ship, and I learned enough to know that they were all Kassids. That would seem to account for that business in the legends about their being able to change forms. The local lads thought the same thing about us at first, remember, on account of our having two sexes. Over to you."

"An interesting conundrum," Harlow commented, fourteen minutes later. "They're neither a race nor an empire. What are they? Over."

"They're an idea," said Samson grimly. "The idea is a pretty complex one, and I don't think I got all of it, luckily. The effect of that arnophrene, at a guess, was to drop my I.Q. about forty or fifty points. But I can tell you what it is: it's a completely convincing argument—on the emotional *and* logical levels—why you should never break the peace or stop loving your neighbor. If you're thinking that you've heard arguments like that before, and we're still the same

old robbing, raping and fire-setting crew, you're wrong. *You haven't heard this one.* I'm telling you that I only got the fringe of it, and it made me want to bawl. Once you've heard it—*if* you've got the intellect to take it completely—you'll never forget it for a minute, and you won't find any loopholes. You won't backslide, and you won't be a Sunday believer. You'd sooner cut your throat."

"Over," added Midge quietly.

Samson smiled at her and waited for Harlow's reply.

"I guess I believe you," said Harlow's voice when the time was up, "but it would be hard to swallow if it hadn't been for Jackson. I want to ask you two things. First, is there any question in your mind about what would happen to homo sap if this state of mind spread? Second, what do you think we can do about it? Over."

"One," said Samson promptly, "no. Once you've heard the Word, and understood it, you *know* there isn't anything more important than spreading it to other people. We would become Kassids—meaning that the Word would come before everything else—meaning in turn that we'd stop being the masterful mayflies who boss this half of the galaxy. We might not even stay where we are. In fact, there would be a lot of changes, some big, some small, but they would all add up to this: the human race as we know it would cease to exist...and we can't have that, can we? The universe may belong to the angels, but we're men. You can believe that I'm not telling you this just to put your mind at rest about Jackson. We've never had any serious opposition in the six hundred years we've been spreading out, but this is it. These are the kids that can finish us with one hand tied behind their backs."

He paused. "It occurred to me a long time ago, when I was a student, that if anything ever did fold us up, it wouldn't

be a gang of monsters breathing pure fluorine and squirting death rays from every tentacle, it would be an idea. You can kill monsters, but you can't kill an idea. From Genghis Khan to Hitler, not one of the real conquerors—the guys who just wanted to grab everything in sight—hung on to a half-credit's worth of what they got. But the Roman Empire was an idea; so was Islam, Christendom, Communism and Anticentrism.

"Two, I don't know what we can do about it. I'll tell you some things we can't do. We can't make war on the Kassids. If we did, everything we've got in this Slice, from shipyards to outhouses, would be buried under crowds of howling neuters in about two seconds. I don't think we can quarantine them, or ourselves, forever. There isn't anything they want in the universe, except to spread the Word, so I don't see how we could make any kind of a deal with them."

He took a deep breath. "Let me tell you what else I found out, and maybe something will occur to you. I said before that the idea is complicated. That's why ethics go up with intelligence, maybe. And that's why the races we've met, that remember the Kassids, aren't Kassids themselves. They're not bright enough. That explains something that's had us wondering for the last six centuries—why there isn't a single race in our part of the galaxy that rates higher than a fairly bright twelve-year-old on our scale. There isn't any correlation between sexual reproduction and intelligence, as my wife and some others would have you believe. It's simply that the others grasped the idea—became Kassids. Eventually the Kassids had done all the proselytizing they could. That was roughly fifteen thousand years ago. Either they missed us altogether, or we weren't much better than an ape's cousin at that stage; otherwise they made a clean sweep of the galaxy. Do you know what happened then? Do you know

where they went?" He paused for breath again. "They went to the nearer Magellanic Cloud, and that's where they've been all this time. Some of the life forms I saw are from there. The same thing happened—eventually they absorbed all the intelligence there was. So they came back, hoping some had grown in this galaxy—and they found us." He sighed. "Over."

Harlow's voice came back. "Sounds stinking. Anything else?"

"One more thing," Samson told him. "This slip of plastic they handed me as a souvenir. They gave me a verbal translation, and I remember it word for word. It's a dictionary entry: *'Man, noun. A pentagonal, dipolar, monoplane dominant of intelligence 96'*—that's on their scale with the average Kassid race at 100—*'native of District so-and-so.'* The significance of it, from their point of view, is the '96.' It's the first time they've been able to make an entry over 75 in the last twelve or fourteen hundred years."

He frowned. "When I first got back and Midge neutralized the drugs, I thought of it, and it seemed to me there might be an answer there. A definition describes the observer as well as the thing observed. That seemed like a brilliant thought to me at the time, but I can't see any help in it now." He blinked unhappily. "All it seems to say is that they've got a superficial and oversimplified system of classification, meaning the physical structure isn't important to them—which we know already... my guess would be, incidentally, that the one who talked to me was picked because the Kassids thought I'd feel at home with it. It had five extremities, although none of them was a head; it had a top and bottom and it faced in one direction. Ergo, it looked just like a man. Over."

Midge said thoughtfully, "It's funny. If they were so geometrical about it, why didn't they say bisexual?"

Samson chortled. "You *would*—" he began, and stopped abruptly, with a stricken expression. "Wait a minute," he said. "Cancel the over. Everybody shut up, even you, Harlow. The Midget has said something."

Midge seemed to be trying to look indignant, pleased in spite of herself.

"Harlow, Midge," said Samson slowly after a time, "there's one other thing about life in this universe that's been puzzling us for the last six centuries. We know now that it has nothing to do with intelligence level, but we still don't know why everybody else but us reproduces by simple division, budding, spores or conjugation—and in consequence, lives a damn sight longer than we do, almost long enough to make up for their low native intelligence. But just suppose that Earth really is a freak planet—suppose that even the Kassids have never run into a bisexual organism before. I didn't mention it to them, and I'm willing to bet Jackson didn't either. You know how tough it is to explain to a xeno—it generally takes ten days to convince them you're not kidding. And, Harlow—suppose that I go down there again, and take Midge along...."

When they re-entered the ship, Harlow's voice was saying, "Are you there, Charles and Midge? Speak up, dammit. Over."

The Samsons looked at each other, glassy-eyed. "With you in a minute, Harlow," Samson croaked, and lurched after Midge into the sick bay. Both of them were full of arnophrene—Samson's second dose within two hours, and an extra-heavy one for Midge.

They staggered into the living chamber again, some time later, and collapsed on opposite sides of the couch.

"Never again," said Midge faintly.

Samson wet his lips. "It worked, Papa. They swallowed it. I gave Midge enough of the stuff to make her about twice as disconnected as usual. I walked in with a long face and told them that the change had started in my absence. They wanted to know what change. I pointed to Midge, and we stripped for them. They may not be interested in shapes, but there was enough difference there to make them take notice. They called a conference, and probed and poked and x-rayed us. I told them the story of the caterpillar and the butterfly. Or the nymph and the waterbug, I should say. You're the ugliest and dumbest member of this family, Midge."

Midge made an inarticulate sound.

"I told them we're a two-stage organism," Samson said. "One stage builds all the tall buildings, writes all the novels, does all the high-class thinking. The other stage reproduces. I said we have a forty-thousand-year cycle, half to each, but the first stage always tries to retard the metamorphosis, because the second stage is so stupid that it ruins our civilization every time, and we have to start from scratch. I said I was awfully sorry, but the change had come earlier than we expected this time, and there was nothing we could do about it... They're going off to the Great Nebula in Andromeda. Maybe they'll find sixteen quintillion brainy races there, and they'll never come back. The other way, at least we've got twenty thousand years to think up another gag."

He sighed. "All right, Papa. Over."

Fourteen slow minutes went by. Samson and his wife looked at each other and said nothing.

The Kassids had tried converting Midge, to see if she were as moronic as described. Midge had reacted properly, being so befuddled that she could hardly work her way through a sentence; but she had heard a faint echo of the Word.

Harlow said, "I don't know what to say to you, kids. You'll be remembered for this, both of you. A long time. History's been a dull subject for the last few centuries, but this will liven it up. I don't think anybody will hesitate to call it a major victory. Over."

Samson smiled, bitterly and sadly.

"That depends," he said, "on how you define 'victory.'"

I SEE YOU

You are five, hiding in a place only you know. You are covered with bark dust, scratched by twigs, sweaty and hot. A wind sighs in the aspen leaves. A faint steady hiss comes from the viewer you hold in your hands; then a voice: "Lorie, I see you—under the barn, eating an apple!" A silence. "Lorie, come on out, I see you." Another voice. "That's right, she's in there." After a moment, sulkily: "Oh, okay."

You squirm around, raising the viewer to aim it down the hill. As you turn the knob with your thumb, the bright image races toward you, trees hurling themselves into red darkness and vanishing, then the houses in the compound, and now you see Bruce standing beside the corral, looking into his viewer, slowly turning. His back is to you; you know you are safe, and you sit up. A jay passes with a whir of wings, settles on a branch. With your own eyes now you can see Bruce, only a dot of blue beyond the gray shake walls of the houses. In the viewer, he is turning toward you, and you duck again. Another voice: "Children, come in and get washed for dinner now." "Aw, Aunt Ellie!" "Mom, we're playing hide and seek. Can't we just stay fifteen minutes more?" "Please, Aunt

Ellie!" "No, come on in now—you'll have plenty of time after dinner." And Bruce: "Aw, okay. All out's in free." And once more they have not found you; your secret place is yours alone.

Call him Smith. He was the president of a company that bore his name and which held more than a hundred patents in the scientific instrument field. He was sixty, a widower. His only daughter and her husband had been killed in a plane crash in 1978. He had a partner who handled the business operations now; Smith spent most of his time in his own lab. In the spring of 1990 he was working on an image intensification device that was puzzling because it was too good. He had it on his bench now, aimed at a deep shadow box across the room; at the back of the box was a card ruled with black, green, red and blue lines. The only source of illumination was a single ten-watt bulb hung behind the shadow box; the light reflected from the card did not even register on his meter, and yet the image in the screen of his device was sharp and bright. When he varied the inputs to the components in a certain way, the bright image vanished and was replaced by shadows, like the ghost of another image. He had monitored every television channel, had shielded the device against radio frequencies, and the ghosts remained. Increasing the illumination did not make them clearer. They were vaguely rectilinear shapes without any coherent pattern. Occasionally a moving blur traveled slowly across them.

Smith made a disgusted sound. He opened the clamps that held the device and picked it up, reaching for the power switch with his other hand. He never touched it. As he moved the device, the ghost images had shifted; they were dancing now with the faint movements of his hand. Smith

stared at them without breathing for a moment. Holding the cord, he turned slowly. The ghost images whirled, vanished, reappeared. He turned the other way; they whirled back.

Smith set the device down on the bench with care. His hands were shaking. He had had the thing clamped down on the bench all the time until now. "Christ almighty, how dumb can one man get?" he asked the empty room.

You are six, almost seven, and you are being allowed to use the big viewer for the first time. You are perched on a cushion in the leather chair at the console; your brother, who has been showing you the controls with a bored and superior air, has just left the room, saying, "All right, if you know so much, do it yourself."

In fact, the controls on this machine are unfamiliar; he little viewers you have used all your life have only one knob, for nearer or farther—to move up/down, or left/right, you just point the viewer where you want to see. This machine has dials and little windows with numbers in them, and switches and pushbuttons, most of which you don't understand, but you know they are for special purposes and don't matter. The main control is a metal rod, right in front of you, with a gray plastic knob on the top. The knob is dull from years of handling; it feels warm and a little greasy in your hand. The console has a funny electric smell, but the big screen, taller than you are, is silent and dark. You can feel your heart beating against your breastbone. You grip the knob harder, push it forward just a little. The screen lights, and you are drifting across the next room as if on huge silent wheels, chairs and end tables turning into reddish silhouettes that shrink, twist and disappear as you pass through them, and for a moment you feel dizzy because when you notice the red numbers jumping in the console to your left, it is as if

the whole house were passing massively and vertiginously through itself; then you are floating out the window with the same slow and steady motion, on across the sunlit pasture where two saddle horses stand with their heads up, sniffing the wind; then a stubbled field, dropping away; and now, below you, the co-op road shines like a silver-gray stream. You press the knob down to get closer, and drop with a giddy swoop; now you are rushing along the road, overtaking and passing a yellow truck, turning the knob to steer. At first you blunder into the dark trees on either side, and once the earth surges up over you in a chaos of writhing red shapes, but now you are learning, and you soar down past the crossroads, up the farther hill, and now, now you are on the big road, flying eastward, passing all the cars, rushing toward the great world where you long to be.

It took Smith six weeks to increase the efficiency of the image intensifier enough to bring up the ghost pictures clearly. When he succeeded, the image on the screen was instantly recognizable. It was a view of Jack McCranie's office; the picture was still dim, but sharp enough that Smith could see the expression on Jack's face. He was leaning back in his chair, hands behind his head. Beside him stood Peg Spatola in a purple dress, with her hand on an open folder. She was talking, and McCranie was listening. That was wrong, because Peg was not supposed to be back from Cleveland until next week.

Smith reached for the phone and punched McCranie's number.

"Yes, Tom?"

"Jack, is Peg in there?"

"Why, no—she's in Cleveland, Tom."

"Oh, yes."

McCranie sounded puzzled. "Is anything the matter?" In the screen, he had swiveled his chair and was talking to Peg, gesturing with short, choppy motions of his arm.

"No, nothing," said Smith. "That's all right, Jack, thank you." He broke the connection. After a moment he turned to the breadboard controls of the device and changed one setting slightly. In the screen, Peg turned and walked backward out of the office. When he turned the knob the other way, she repeated these actions in reverse. Smith tinkered with the other controls until he got a view of the calendar on Jack's desk. It was Friday, June 15th—last week.

Smith locked up the device and all his notes, went home and spent the rest of the day thinking.

By the end of July he had refined and miniaturized the device and had extended its sensitivity range into the infrared. He spend most of August, when he should have been on vacation, trying various methods of detecting sound through the device. By focusing on the interior of a speaker's larynx and using infrared, he was able to convert the visible vibrations of the vocal cords into sound of fair quality, but that did not satisfy him. He worked for a while on vibrations picked up from panes of glass in windows and on framed pictures, and he experimented briefly with the diaphragms in speaker systems, intercoms and telephones. He kept on into October without stopping and finally achieved a system that would give tinny but recognizable sound from any vibrating surface—a wall, a floor, even the speaker's own cheek or forehead.

He redesigned the whole device, built a prototype and tested it, tore it down, redesigned, built another. It was Christmas before he was done. Once more he locked up the device and all his plans, drawings and notes.

At home he spent the holidays experimenting with commercial adhesives in various strengths. He applied these to coated paper, let them dry, and cut the paper into rectangles. He numbered these rectangles, pasted them onto letter envelopes, some of which he stacked loose; others he bundled together and secured with rubber bands. He opened the stacks and bundles and examined them at regular intervals. Some of the labels curled up and detached themselves after twenty-six hours without leaving any conspicuous trace. He made up another batch of these, typed his home address on six of them. On each of six envelopes he typed his office address, then covered it with one of the labels. He stamped the envelopes and dropped them into a mailbox. All six, minus their labels, were delivered to the office three days later.

Just after New Year's, he told his partner that he wanted to sell out and retire. They discussed it in general terms.

Using an assumed name and a post office box number which was not his, Smith wrote to a commission agent in Boston with whom he had never had any previous dealings. He mailed the letter, with the agent's address covered by one of his labels on which he had typed a fictitious address. The label detached itself in transit; the letter was delivered. When the agent replied, Smith was watching and read the letter as the secretary typed it. The agent followed his instruction to mail his reply in an envelope without return address. The owner of the post office box turned it in marked "not here"; it went to the dead-letter office and was returned in due time, but meanwhile Smith had acknowledged the letter and had mailed, in the same way, a large amount of cash. In subsequent letters he instructed the agent to take bids for components, plans for which he enclosed, from electronics manufacturers, for plastic casings from another, and for

assembly and shipping from still another company. Through a second commission agent in New York, to whom he wrote in the same way, he contracted for ten thousand copies of an instruction booklet in four colors.

Late in February he bought a house and an electronics dealership in a small town in the Adirondacks. In March he signed over his interest in the company to his partner, cleaned out his lab and left. He sold his co-op apartment in Manhattan and his summer house in Connecticut, moved to his new home and became anonymous.

You are thirteen, chasing a fox with the big kids for the first time. They have put you in the north field, the worst place, but you know better than to leave it.

"He's in the glen."

"I see him, he's in the brook, going upstream."

You turn the viewer, racing forward through dappled shade, a brilliance of leaves: there is the glen, and now you see the fox, trotting through the shallows, blossoms of bright water at its feet.

"Ken and Nell, you come down ahead of him by the springhouse. Wanda, you and Tim and Jean stay where you are. Everybody else come upstream, but stay back till I tell you."

That's Leigh, the oldest. You turn the viewer, catch a glimpse of Bobby running downhill through the woods, his long hair flying. Then back to the glen: the fox is gone.

"He's heading up past the corncrib!"

"Okay, keep spread out on both sides, everybody. Jim, can you and Edie head him off before he gets to the woods?"

"We'll try. There he is!"

And the chase is going away from you, as you knew it would, but soon you will be older, as old as Nell and Jim;

then you will be in the middle of things, and your life will begin.

By trial and error, Smith has found the settings for Dallas, November 22, 1963: Dealey Plaza, 12:25 p.m. He sees the Presidential motorcade making the turn onto Elm Street. Kennedy slumps forward, raising his hands to his throat. Smith presses a button to hold the moment in time. He scans behind the motorcade, finds the sixth floor of the Book Depository Building, finds the window. There is no one behind the barricade of cartons; the room is empty. He scans the nearby rooms, finds nothing. He tries the floor below. At an open window a man kneels, holding a high-powered rifle. Smith photographs him. He returns to the motorcade, watches as the second shot strikes the President. He freezes time again, scans the surrounding buildings, finds a second marksman on a roof, photographs him. Back to the motorcade. A third and fourth shot, the last blowing off the side of the President's head. Smith freezes the action again, finds two gunmen on the grassy knoll, one aiming across the top of a station wagon, one kneeling in the shrubbery. He photographs them. He turns off the power, sits for a moment, then goes to the washroom, kneels beside the toilet and vomits.

The viewer is your babysitter, your television, your telephone (the telephone lines are still up, but they are used only as signaling devices; when you know that somebody wants to talk to you, you focus your viewer on him), your library, your school. Before puberty you watch other people having sex, but even then your curiosity is easily satisfied; after an older cousin initiates you at fourteen, you are much more interested in doing it yourself. The co-op teacher

monitors your studies, sometimes makes suggestions, but more and more, as you grow older, leaves you to your own devices. You are intensely interested in African prehistory, in the European theater, and in the ant-civilization of Epsilon Eridani IV. Soon you will have to choose.

New York Harbor, November 4, 1872—a cold, blustery day. A two-masted ship rides at anchor; on her stern is lettered: MARY CELESTE. Smith advances the time control. A flicker of darkness, light again, and the ship is gone. He turns back again until he finds it standing out under light canvas past Sandy Hook. Manipulating time and space controls at once, he follows it eastward through a flickering of storm and sun—loses it, finds it again, counting days as he goes. The farther eastward, the more he has to tilt the device downward, while the image of the ship tilts correspondingly away from him. Because of the angle, he can no longer keep the ship in view from a distance but must track it closely. November 21 and 22, violent storms: the ship is dashed upward by waves, falls again, visible only intermittently; it takes him five hours to pass through two days of real time. The 23rd is calmer, but on the 24th another storm blows up. Smith rubs his eyes, loses the ship, finds it again after a ten-minute search.

The gale blows itself out on the morning of the 26th. The sun is bright, the sea almost dead calm. Smith is able to catch glimpses of figures on deck, tilted above dark cross-sections of the hull. A sailor is splicing a rope in the stern, two others lowering a triangular sail between the foremast and the bowsprit, and a fourth is at the helm. A little group stands leaning on the starboard rail; one of them is a woman. The next glimpse is that of a running figure who advances into the screen and disappears. Now the men are lowering a boat

over the side; the rail has been removed and lies on the deck. The men drop into the boat and row away. He hears them shouting to each other but cannot make out the words.

Smith turns to the ship again: the deck is empty. He dips below to look at the hold, filled with casks, then the cabin, then the forecastle. There is no sign of anything wrong — no explosion, no fire, no trace of violence. When he looks up again, he sees the sails flapping, then bellying out full. The sea is rising. He looks for the boat, but now too much time has passed and he cannot find it. He returns to the ship and now reverses the time control, tracks it backward until the men are again in their places on the deck. He looks again at the group standing at the rail; now he sees that the woman has a child in her arms. The child struggles, drops over the rail. Smith hears the woman shriek. In a moment she too is over the rail and falling into the sea.

He watches the men running, sees them launch the boat. As they pull away, he is able to keep the focus near enough to see and hear them. One calls, "My God, who's at the helm?" Another, a bearded man with a face gone tallow-pale, replies, "Never mind — row!" They are staring down into the sea. After a moment one looks up, then another. The *Mary Celeste,* with three of the four sails on her foremast set, is gliding away, slowly, now faster; now she is gone.

Smith does not run through the scene again to watch the child and her mother drown, but others do.

The production model was ready for shipping in September. It was a simplified version of the prototype, with only two controls, one for space, one for time. The range of the device was limited to one thousand miles. Nowhere on the casing of the device or in the instruction booklet was a patent number or a pending patent mentioned. Smith had called the

device Ozo, perhaps because he thought it sounded vaguely Japanese. The booklet described the device as a distant viewer and gave clear, simple instructions for its use. One sentence read cryptically: "Keep Time Control set at zero." It was like "Wet Paint — Do Not Touch."

During the week of September 23, seven thousand Ozos were shipped to domestic and Canadian addresses supplied by Smith: five hundred to electronics manufacturers and suppliers, six thousand, thirty to a carton, marked "On Consignment," to TV outlets in major cities, and the rest to private citizens chosen at random. The instruction booklets were in sealed envelopes packed with each device. Three thousand more went to Europe, South and Central America, and the Middle East.

A few of the outlets which received the cartons opened them the same day, tried the devices out, and put them on sale at prices ranging from $49.95 to $125. By the following day the word was beginning to spread, and by the close of business on the third day every store was sold out. Most people who got them, either through the mail or by purchase, used them to spy on their neighbors and on people in hotels.

In a house in Cleveland, a man watches his brother-in-law in the next room, who is watching his wife getting out of a taxi. She goes into the lobby of an apartment building. The husband watches as she gets into the elevator, rides to the fourth floor. She rings the bell beside the door marked 410. The door opens; a dark-haired man takes her in his arms; they kiss.

The brother-in-law meets him in the hall. "Don't do it, Charlie."

"Get out of my way."

"I'm not going to get out of your way, and I tell you, don't do it. Not now and not later."

"Why the hell shouldn't I?"

"Because if you do I'll kill you. If you want a divorce, OK, get a divorce. But don't lay a hand on her or I'll find you the farthest place you can go."

Smith got his consignment of Ozos early in the week, took one home and left it to his store manager to put a price on the rest. He did not bother to use the production model but began at once to build another prototype. It had controls calibrated to one-hundredth of a second and one millimeter, and a timer that would allow him to stop a scene, or advance or regress it at any desired rate. He ordered some clockwork from an astronomical supply house.

A high-ranking officer in Army Intelligence, watching the first demonstration of the Ozo in the Pentagon, exclaimed, "My God, with this we could dismantle half the establishment—all we've got to do is launch interceptors when we see them push the button."

"It's a good thing Senator Burkhart can't hear you say that," said another officer. But by the next afternoon everybody had heard it.

A Baptist minister in Louisville led the first mob against an Ozo assembly plant. A month later, while civil and criminal suits against all the rioters were still pending, tapes showing each one of them in compromising or ludicrous activities were widely distributed in the area.

The commission agents who had handled the orders for

the first Ozos were found out and had to leave town. Factories were fire-bombed, but others took their place.

The first Ozo was smuggled into the Soviet Union from West Germany by Katerina Belov, a member of a dissident group in Moscow, who used it to document illegal government actions. The device was seized on December 13 by the KGB; Belov and two other members of the group were arrested, imprisoned and tortured. By that time over forty other Ozos were in the hands of dissidents.

You are watching an old movie, *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*. The humor seems infantile and unimaginative to you; you are not interested in the actresses' occasional seminudity. What strikes you as hilarious is the coyness, the sidelong glances, smiles, grimaces hinting at things that will never be shown on the screen. You realize that these people have never seen anyone but their most intimate friends without clothing, have never seen any adult shit or piss, and would be embarrassed or disgusted if they did. Why did children say "pee-pee" and "poo-poo," and then giggle? You have read scholarly books about taboos on "bodily functions," but why was shitting worse than sneezing?

Cora Zickwolfe, who lived in a remote rural area of Arizona and whose husband commuted to Tucson, arranged with her nearest neighbor, Phyllis Mell, for each of them to keep an Ozo focused on the bulletin board in the other's kitchen. On the bulletin board was a note that said "OK." If there was any trouble and she couldn't get to the phone, she would take down the note, or if she had time, write another.

In April, 1992, about the time her husband usually got home, an intruder broke into the house and seized Mrs.

Zickwolfe before she had time to get to the bulletin board. He dragged her into the bedroom and forced her to disrobe. The state troopers got there in fifteen minutes, and Cora never spoke to her friend Phyllis again.

Between 1992 and 2002 more than six hundred improvements and supplements to the Ozo were recorded. The most important of these was the power system created by focusing the Ozo at a narrow aperture on the interior of the Sun. Others included the system of satellite slave units in stationary orbits and a computerized tracer device which would keep the Ozo focused on any subject.

Using the tracer, an entomologist in Mexico City is following the ancestral line of a honey bee. The images bloom and expire, ten every second: the tracer is following each queen back to the egg, then the egg to the queen that laid it, then that queen to the egg. Tens of thousands of generations have passed; in two thousand hours, beginning with a Paleocene bee, he has traveled back into the Cretaceous. He stops at intervals to follow the bee in real time, then accelerates again. The hive is growing smaller, more primitive. Now it is only a cluster of round cells, and the bee is different, more like a wasp. His year's labor is coming to fruition. He watches, forgetting to eat, almost to breathe.

In your mother's study after she dies you find an elaborate chart of her ancestors and your father's. You retrieve the program for it, punch it in, and idly watch a random sampling, back into time, first the female line, then the male... a teacher of biology in Boston, a suffragette, a corn merchant, a singer, a Dutch farmer in New York, a British

sailor, a German musician. Their faces glow in the screen, bright-eyed, cheeks flushed with life. Someday you too will be only a series of images in a screen.

Smith is watching the planet Mars. The clockwork which turns the Ozo to follow the planet, even when it is below the horizon, makes it possible for him to focus instantly on the surface, but he never does this. He takes up his position hundreds of thousands of miles away, then slowly approaches, in order to see the red spark grow to a disk, then to a yellow sunlit ball hanging in darkness. Now he can make out the surface features: Syrtis Major and Thoth-Nepenthes leading in a long gooseneck to Utopia and the frostcap.

The image as it swells hypnotically toward him is clear and sharp, without tremor or atmospheric distortion. It is summer in the northern hemisphere: Utopia is wide and dark. The planet fills the screen, and now he turns northward, over the cratered desert still hundreds of miles distant. A dust storm, like a yellow veil, obscures the curved neck of Thoth-Nepenthes; then he is beyond it, drifting down to the edge of the frostcap. The limb of the planet reappears; he floats like a glider over the dark surface tinted with rose and violet-gray; now he can make out individual plants. He is drifting among their gnarled gray stems, their leaves of violet horn; he sees the curious misshapen growths that may be air bladders or some grotesque analogue of blossoms. Now, at the edge of the screen, something black and spindling leaps. He follows it instantly, finds it, brings it hugely magnified into the center of the screen: a thing like a hairy beetle, its body covered with thick black hairs or spines; it stands on six jointed legs, waving its antennae, its mouth parts busy.

And its four bright eyes stare into his, across forty million miles.

Smith's hair got whiter and thinner. Before the 1992 Crash, he made heavy contributions to the International Red Cross and to volunteer organizations in Europe, Asia and Africa. He got drunk periodically, but always alone. From 1993 to 1996 he stopped reading the newspapers.

He wrote down the coordinates for the plane crash in which his daughter and her husband had died, but never used them.

At intervals while dressing or looking into the bathroom mirror, he stared as if into an invisible camera and raised one finger. In his last years he wrote some poems.

We know his name. Patient researchers, using advanced scanning techniques, followed his letters back through the postal system and found him, but by that time he was safely dead.

The whole world has been at peace for more than a generation. Crime is almost unheard of. Free energy has made the world rich, but the population is stable, even though early detection has wiped out most diseases. Everyone can do whatever he likes, providing his neighbors would not disapprove, and after all, their views are the same as his own.

You are forty, a respected scholar, taking a few days out to review your life, as many people do at your age. You have watched your mother and father coupling on the night they conceived you, watched yourself growing in her womb, first a red tadpole, then a thing like an embryo chicken, then a big-headed baby kicking and squirming. You have seen yourself delivered, seen the first moment when your bloody head broke into the light. You have seen yourself staggering

about the nursery in rompers, clutching a yellow plastic duck. Now you are watching yourself hiding behind the fallen tree on the hill, and you realize that there are no secret places. And beyond you in the ghostly future you know that someone is watching you as you watch; and beyond that watcher another, and beyond that another... Forever.

TARCAN OF THE HOBOES

In the spring of the year 19—, John Clayton and his pregnant young wife set out on a journey by railroad from Boston to Los Angeles, where Clayton had been offered a post as manager of an orange plantation. Clayton's father, the banker Cyrus T. Clayton, was a millionaire many times over, but it was his wish that his son earn his own way in the world rather than become a playboy or ne'er-do-well; therefore Clayton and his bride were poor, but their hopes were high. On the third day, as Clayton was taking the air in the vestibule, he happened to observe the conductor and a porter standing close together just inside the next car. Words were exchanged which Clayton could not hear; then the conductor, whose face was empurpled with rage, struck the porter and knocked him down.

Clayton stepped across to the vestibule of the next car and opened the door. The porter, with blood on his lip, was trying to rise, and the conductor had drawn back his foot to kick him.

"Look here," said Clayton quietly, removing his pipe from his mouth. "This won't do, you know."

The conductor turned to him with a foul oath. "You're only a d----d passenger," he said. "Keep out of this, if you know what's good for you, Mr. Clayton."

The porter, meanwhile, got to his feet and slunk away, casting a malevolent glance back over his shoulder at the conductor.

"I may be only a passenger, as you say," Clayton said, "but if I observe any such conduct again, I shall report you."

The conductor, who was obviously drunk, stared at him sullenly with his reddened eyes, then turned with another oath and stalked away.

At breakfast the following morning, Clayton saw a little knot of waiters in close conversation at the end of the car. As Clayton and his wife were rising to leave, one of the waiters approached them casually and murmured in Clayton's ear, "Black Bart says, you keep in your compartment today."

"What did that man say, dear?" inquired Alice. "Is something wrong?"

"No, it's nothing," said Clayton lightly, but once they were in their compartment he took her hands and said earnestly, "Dearest, I'm afraid there's going to be trouble on the train. Don't lose heart. We must just wait and trust in God's mercy."

"I'm going to be brave," said Alice, and they sat down together, with hands clutched tightly. After an hour had passed, they heard a loud report from the forward end of the train; then another, then a fusillade, followed by deathly silence.

The Claytons waited, with straining ears and beating hearts. At last the door was flung open, and in the aperture appeared a porter with a revolver in his hand. "Wanted in the rear," he said. He would not reply to their anxious questions, but herded them down the corridor. When they reached the dining car, a terrible sight met their eyes. All the other

passengers were there, crowded between the tables, with their hands bound behind them, while two waiters rifled their pockets, throwing wallets, watches and coins into a bag held by a third ruffian.

"What is the meaning of this?" Clayton cried, turning to the porter who had escorted them. "Where is the conductor?"

The man's face split in an evil grin. "The *meaning* is, we've took the train, see? We've threw the conductor off, *and* the engineer and the fireman, see? So stand right there and keep your d----d traps shut, or it'll be worse for you."

Clayton put his arm around his trembling wife and they watched as the porters, having finished their thievery, began to herd the bound passengers toward the farther end of the car. At first they did not understand the dreadful thing that was about to take place; then they heard a chorus of shrieks, and, turning to look out the window, saw three passengers tumbling down the embankment as the train hurtled on. The grisly scene was repeated, again and again, until the last passenger was gone: only the Claytons remained.

Toward them now came the man Clayton had seen knocked down by the conductor. Beside him was the man with the bag of stolen valuables.

"Give me your wallet," said the porter, holding out his hand, "you won't need it."

"This is an outrage," said Clayton, but he handed over his watch and wallet.

"Speak polite when Black Bart talks to you," said the man with the bag. "Now the lady — purse and rings." Alice gave him the articles he requested, but when he pointed to the locket she wore on a chain around her neck, she shrank away. "No, please not that," she protested. "It is the dearest thing I own — a present from my husband. It has no value to you, but to me it is worth more than gold or diamonds."

"Give it to him, dear, you must," said Clayton, but Black Bart pushed the bagman aside. "Keep the locket," he said gruffly to Alice, and pulled the emergency cord. After a moment they heard the squeal of brakes, and the car rocked as the train slowed down.

"Bring their luggage," said Black Bart, and a porter scurried away.

"What do you intend doing with us?" Clayton demanded.

"Putting you off the train, but you'll land soft, not like them others. You done me a good turn once, and Black Bart don't forget."

"I don't like it," said another man, shouldering forward. "I say tie their hands and shove them over the side like the rest." There was a murmur of agreement from the other mutineers.

"What's this?" said Bart, turning slowly around. There was a revolver in his hand. "You boys elected me conductor, didn't you? Well, I'm the conductor, and what I say goes."

"Maybe it don't. Suppose we unelect you, Bart, and throw you over too?"

Bart's expression did not change, but his fist shot out and cracked against the other man's jaw. The ruffian fell without a sound and sprawled senseless on the floor.

"Anybody else?" demanded Bart, glaring around. The mutineers were silent.

"Now listen," said Bart, bringing his unshaven face close to Clayton's. "When we stop, get off quick, because I can't keep this scum in line forever. You'll have your luggage, and you'll find some tools in one of the suitcases. I'm giving you a chance, and that's the best I can do."

"But my God, man," cried Clayton, glancing at the desolate landscape outside, "this is murder."

The porter appeared with their bags just as the train

ground to a halt. "Quick now, or I won't answer for it," said Black Bart.

Herded by a gun in the porter's hands, Clayton and his bride stumbled down onto the rough grade of the railway. Their luggage lay in the weeds below, where the porter had thrown it. No sooner were they clear of the train than it began to move again, gathering speed so quickly that in a few moments the caboose was rushing by them; then the train dwindled in the distance. They watched it until it was only a spot on the horizon.

The Claytons looked about them. They were in the middle of a great wilderness, the heartland of the continent. Not far off there was a little stream, around which trees grew thickly; except for these, and a few other wooded spots, and the railway track itself, there was nothing to break the vast immensity.

"Dearest, what are we to do?" asked Alice.

"Never mind, my dear," said Clayton, although his heart was sinking within him. "We have our luggage, after all, and we have each other."

In one of the suitcases, as Black Bart had promised, he found a set of tools, some nails, screws, and hinges, together with a long-barreled revolver and a box of cartridges, an American flag, some fishing lines and hooks, and other useful things. With the tools, Clayton built a rude shelter in a tree, covering it with blankets draped over branches, and there he and Alice spent their first shivering, lonely night in the wilderness.

On the following day a freight train came hurtling out of the west; Clayton took off his shirt and tried to flag it down, but it roared past and was gone in a cloud of cinders. He knew that Alice's time must be near and that it would be dangerous for her to travel afoot. That day he began the

construction of a sturdier house in the tree, and in the intervals of his labor he showed Alice how to catch grasshoppers for bait and fish in the stream.

Clayton finished the cabin before the end of the week, and none too soon, for he had glimpsed a cougar in the distance. The next night they heard the beast prowling around their tree, and although Clayton tried to calm her, Alice's courage broke when the forest animal climbed the trunk and clawed at the door. That night she bore her child, a boy, while the cougar snarled and snuffled outside.

Alice never recovered completely from the shock of bearing a child in these rude surroundings; she grew steadily weaker and her lucid moments farther apart. At last, three weeks after the birth of the child, she died.

Clayton buried her under a willow beside the stream. Her locket, which contained miniature portraits of her and himself, he kept to remember her by, and he tried to calm the child by swinging the pretty thing back and forth over his crib.

Miles away, in a hobo jungle along the tracks where the freights slowed to climb a steep grade, another boy-child had been born. The mother was Fat Karla, and the father was Big Jim Korchak, who called himself King of the Hoboes. There were others who claimed the title, but wherever Korchak was, he was king. Six feet four and broad in proportion, hairy, dirty, and foul-tempered, Korchak enforced his rule by the weight of his hamlike fists.

He and a half-dozen of his followers had encamped in this desolate place when Karla's time came upon her; now the victuals were running short, and so was Korchak's temper.

From the hills they had seen a thread of smoke rising far out on the plain, day after day. "Where there's smoke there's folks," said Korchak. "And where there's folks there's grub."

So the little band set out, with Korchak at the head as usual, and Karla in the rear carrying her little bundle. The child was fretful, and Karla lagged behind to nurse him. At last Korchak lost his patience; whirling on her, and scattering the other 'boes with his fists, he snarled, "Rotten little brat, what's the use of him anyway?" He plucked the child from its mother's arms and flung it down on the tracks. With a moan, Karla snatched the pitiful bundle up again, but it was too late: the child was dead.

All the rest of that day Karla stumbled along like one demented, clutching the poor little body to her breast. She never spoke, but if any of the other 'boes came near her she backed away snarling, and even Korchak did not approach her again to try to take the child away.

Toward evening they came to the forest by the little stream where John Clayton had built his hut. Softly the men crept up the tree. They listened but heard nothing. Korchak swung himself up through the branches, followed by the others.

John Clayton raised his head from his arms just in time to see the giant hobo fling the door open and rush in. He rose to defend himself, but one terrific blow felled him. He lay on the floor, his neck broken.

The other 'boes were hurrying about the room, ransacking it of its pitiful possessions, but Karla leaped to the crib where the infant, awakened by the struggle, was beginning to wail. She snatched it up, dropping her own dead infant as she did so, and rushed out of the house. The others caught up with her a little way down the track, but Karla would not suffer any of them to come near her. She had another child now, and she would keep it.

In hobo jungles from Natchez to Point Barrow, the boy grew up sturdy and strong. His mother called him George,

but because the bottoms of his ragged britches were always black from sitting on the railroad ties, the hoboes called him "Tarcan," and the name stuck. He learned to use a knife and a slingshot with such deadly accuracy that even the biggest 'boes dared not challenge him; he learned to board a freight at a grade crossing and how to leap from a moving train without injury; he learned which bulls to avoid, and which jails were the warmest in winter. The locket that had been his mother's he wore always under his dirty shirt; he did not know who the pictured people were, but he thought the man looked kind, and the woman beautiful.

When Tarcan was sixteen, Karla died, a used-up old woman; Korchak had wandered away long since. Tarcan went on alone.

Every year or two his wanderings brought him back to the place where he had been born. On one of these occasions, roaming the forest beside the track, he stumbled over the abandoned tree house and went in. Marauding animals had scattered the bones of two skeletons, one of a full-grown man and the other of an infant. Mice and squirrels had done their work with blankets, papers, and the few scraps of worn-out clothing the 'boes had left, but in a closed cabinet Tarcan found a diary, which he could not read, and a children's book, grimed with the prints of tiny fingers. With the packrat instinct of the hobo, he put both books away in his bindle; he ransacked the little cabin for anything else of value, but found nothing except a tiny leather-bound folder.

Later, crouched by his fire in the jungle, he pored over the children's book with its faded pictures. Tarcan could read, after a fashion: he knew "RR Xing," and "Cafe," "City Limits," and a few more words, but this was the first book he had ever tried to read. Although he was untaught, his keen intelligence enabled him to make rapid progress. Soon he

was able to read such sentences as "The boy runs after the spotted dog." Next he turned his attention to the leather folder, and after a few attempts discovered the secret of its metal clasp and opened it. Inside were two photographs, one of a man, the other of a woman: and he knew their faces. With leaping heart, Tarcan withdrew the locket which he wore around his neck and compared the pictured faces: they were the same.

Karla had told him nothing about his birth except that his father had been a gent, and that the locket had belonged to him. Was the man who had died in the lonely tree house, then, Tarcan's father? How had he died, and why had his bones been left for marauding bobcats and coyotes?

Perhaps the other book would give some clue. He opened it eagerly, but it was written in an angular script which at first defeated him. Gradually he began to realize that the letters, unfamiliar as they were, were distorted forms of the printed alphabet. Slowly, sentence by sentence, he puzzled out the diary and read its pathetic story.

When he had done so, he was more bewildered than before. He, Tarcan, could not be the infant the diary spoke of, for its bones were scattered on the floor of the cabin along with its father's. There was no mention of another child, or of Karla.

Many times after that he came back to the deserted cabin and sat there to brood, reading the diary over and over again and hoping that somehow it would disclose its secret. One day, as he sat thus pensive, he heard the hoot of an approaching express, then a terrific crash. Running outside, he beheld an appalling sight: the train had been derailed and its cars lay buckled and overturned up and down the right of way.

On a fine summer evening, Charles Clayton, nephew or Cyrus T. Clayton and heir to the Clayton banking millions, sat comfortably in his private train en route from San Francisco to Boston. With him as his guests were Professor Archimedes Q. Potter and his daughter Jane, and a young French naval officer, Paul D'Arnot. D'Arnot, on Clayton's advice, had converted his personal fortune into gold, obtained at the San Francisco mint; bullion, in a sealed chest, was locked in the baggage compartment.

After a supper of roast pheasant under glass prepared by Clayton's personal chef, the party was preparing to retire to their luxurious compartments for the night when there was a tremendous crash; the car toppled over on its side as if struck by a giant hammer, and the stunned occupants lay dazed on the floor.

Clayton was the first to regain his senses. Struggling to his feet, he ascertained that D'Arnot and the Potters were uninjured; then the two young men succeeded in opening a window and helping the others out. By climbing down the undercarriage of the toppled car, they were able to reach the track.

The sight that met their eyes was daunting. The engine and the coal car were still on the tracks, but the sleeping and dining cars, the saloon and the baggage car lay overturned like a child's toys. All around them lay a vast wasteland, the heart of America.

"My heavens!" ejaculated Professor Potter, fumbling for his glasses, which he had lost in the crash. "What has occurred? Why is the train no longer upright?"

"We have had a crash, Professor," responded Clayton.

"Miss Potter, are you sure you are all right?"

"Yes," said the girl faintly, pressing her hand to her brow, "only a little dizzy, I think."

"Sit down here, please, and you, too, Professor, while Paul and I see if the others need help." Clayton and D'Arnot started off toward the engine, but at this moment the engineer and the fireman dropped to the cinders and came toward them. "What happened, McTaggart?" Clayton called.

"I don't know, sir," responded the engineer, a gruff Scott. "It looks to me as if the roadbed gave way, sir, just after the engine passed over it. The maintenance of this line is something shocking, sir, saving your presence."

It was decided that the engineer and the fireman would proceed to the nearest station to get help. "There is no room for anyone in the cab," Clayton explained, "and you, Miss Potter, cannot ride in a coal car." Accordingly, when the engine and the coal car had been uncoupled, the fireman got up steam and the engine moved rapidly off into the distance.

Tarcan watched from the trees as the little party entered the forest and began exploring. Presently they stumbled over the cabin in the tree, and excited shouts rang back and forth. Water was brought from the stream, and the chef began to prepare a late snack. Jane was to sleep in the cabin, while the men wrapped themselves in blankets on the ground. There were five: Clayton, Professor Potter, D'Arnot, the chef, and a rat-faced baggageman.

That night, as he lay in his sleeping bag watching the cabin, Tarcan saw a flicker of movement near the train; a pale glint of light showed between the trees. His curiosity aroused, he crept closer. Down toward the stream a human figure was moving, dim in the starlight: a faint ray of light, as if from a shielded flashlight, preceded it. As Tarcan noiselessly approached, he saw that it was the baggageman, carrying some bulky object in his arms. The man stumbled over a root with a muffled curse, regained his balance, and at

last set his burden down. Presently Tarcan heard the clink of a spade. He crept as near as he dared, and saw the man digging a hole at the foot of a great tree. When he was done, he lowered a brass-bound chest into the hole, covered it with dirt, then with leaves and branches. Having done so, and rested a moment from his exertions, the baggageman retreated toward the camp.

Tarcan waited until he was gone, then dug up the chest and filled the hole with rocks and earth. The chest was locked; he could not tell what was in it, but from its weight he knew it must be valuable. He carried it deeper into the forest and buried it again.

On the following afternoon, while the men were busy gathering firewood, he saw the golden-haired girl leave the cabin and stroll off through the woods. He pursued her, at a distance. He saw her dip her fingers in the little stream; he saw her pause to examine a patch of forget-me-nots and press the blossoms against her cheek. She wandered to the edge of the woods and strolled out into the meadow beyond. The air was balmy, and she took off her sun-hat and let it trail in her fingers. Tarcan followed, crouching low, ready to drop and conceal himself in the grasses, but she seemed oblivious of his presence.

They came to a low hill, and Jane went on into the valley beyond. Hastening to catch up, Tarcan beheld a horrifying sight. Jane Potter was standing in the open, transfixed with terror, while a tawny cougar crept toward her.

Tarcan leaped forward, shouting, "Run!" For a moment she hesitated, half-turning toward him; then, too late, she began to move. The cougar was hurtling after her, a streak of golden fur.

Tarcan's slingshot was in his hand; he fitted a stone to it without pausing in his career, and let fly. The missile struck

the cougar's shoulder and bowled it over, but it was up at once, snarling. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Jane had tripped or fallen. But he had no time to spare for her: the cougar, with a scream of rage, was springing toward him. Another man might have lost his nerve and fled before that juggernaut of feline fury, but Tarcan coolly stood his ground. He took another stone from his pocket, fitted it into the slingshot, took deliberate aim. The stone struck the charging animal squarely in the forehead, and it rolled over, dead, almost at his feet.

Only then did he turn his attention to the prostrate girl. She was sitting up, her face pale. "You've saved my life," she breathed as he came closer. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Can you walk?"

"I think so." She took his hand and struggled up to her feet, only to collapse again with a little moan. Tarcan's strrong arm went around her, holding her up. "It's my ankle," she said. "I think I must have sprained it."

Tarcan said nothing, but picked her up in his arms as lightly as if she were a child. He crossed the little valley, climbed the hill beyond. At first she was tense with alarm, but after a time she relaxed and let her golden head fall against his shoulder. With the hill behind them, she could not see the railroad tracks, and did not know that he was carrying her in the opposite direction. The sun, dipping toward the western horizon, might have warned her that something was wrong, but Jane Potter, the daughter of an absent-minded Boston professor, was not schooled in the ways of the wilderness.

For a long time they did not speak. Then, "I don't even know your name," she said.

"They call me Tarcan."

"How odd! Is that your real name?"

"Yes." He carried her to the next little stand of trees, and

past it to another. Jane raised her head and looked around. "Surely this isn't the right place," she said. "Are we lost?"

Tarcan, who was never lost, said nothing. In the next patch of forest, where a little tributary stream ran, he carried her by a forest trail to a secluded clearing and set her down. It was dark now in the woods; the light was almost gone.

The girl shrank against the bole of a tree and watched as Tarcan opened the bundle he carried on his back. He withdrew a scrap of cloth and tore it into strips with his strong fingers. How strange he was, this silent forest man! Yet she sensed deep within her that he meant her no harm.

With gentle fingers he probed her injured ankle. It was slightly swollen, and painful, but no bones were broken. He bound it with the cloth, then stood up. "You're not leaving?" she asked in alarm.

"Just a minute," he said curtly, and disappeared into the trees.

In a few moments he was back, carrying a heap of branches in his arms. With the smaller twigs he built a tiny fire, and with the longer ones he began to construct a rude shelter, leaning the branches together and tying them with twine. When the little fire had died to embers, he opened two cans of pork and beans and heated them. They ate in silence; then Tarcan drew a waterproof poncho from his bindle and draped it across the shelter for a roof. "Time for bed," he said.

The girl hesitated, for she was alone in the wilderness with an unknown man. Tarcan seemed to sense what she was thinking; he took out his clasp knife, opened it and handed it to her, handle first. She crept into the rude shelter, where Tarcan had made a bed of fragrant leaves, and saw him stretch out on the ground in his sleeping bag.

When the men at camp realized that Jane was missing, they ran about calling her name futilely until the cook discovered a clue: Jane's dainty handkerchief, dropped beside the trail. They gathered to look at the little scrap of cloth, mute witness to a tragedy. "Give me some food, please, in a knapsack or suitcase," said old Professor Potter sadly. "I shall go into the wilderness after my daughter, and if I do not find her I shall not return."

"Professor, pardon me, that will not do," said Paul D'Arnot. "You have lost your glasses and cannot see even a foot in front of your face. It is I who shall go, and I promise that I shall bring your daughter home safely."

"And I, too," cried Clayton.

"*Mon ami,* a word in your ear," said the Frenchman quietly, and drew Clayton aside. "If we should both go, who will guard the Professor from harm? There are savage animals here, and besides, to be frank, I do not like the look of your baggageman."

After some discussion, it was agreed that D'Arnot would go in search of the missing girl, and that if he did not return in two days, the rest would go in search of him; meanwhile, if Jane should return, Clayton would fire a pistol in order to alert him. D'Arnot, with a few provisions hastily thrust into a traveling case, slipped into the forest.

D'Arnot guessed that the girl had followed the path beside the stream, but he did not see the traces where she had wandered away from it; he pursued the stream, therefore, and at nightfall he made camp miles distant from the place where Tarcan and Jane lay.

On the following day he pressed on into the wilderness, heavy of heart, for he did not believe that Jane would ever be

found. The sun was low when, in a little clearing, he stopped short. Facing him across the greensward, motionless and menacing, was a gigantic coyote. Seeing his hesitation, the beast bared its fangs and charged.

D'Arnot was a brave man, but he was unarmed. He sprang for the nearest tree and scrambled up it. Then, in a moment of horror, he realized that a branch to which he had trusted his weight was rotten; it parted with a sickening crack and D'Arnot plummeted to the ground. His head struck a stone, and he knew no more.

In the morning Tarcan examined the girl's ankle and found it still swollen; he picked her up again and started back toward the camp. Jane lay in his arms with a feeling of perfect trust, glancing now and then through her lashes at his strong, soiled face. She fell into a daydream; she wished the journey might last forever.

All too soon, she saw that they were approaching the camp. Tarcan set her down gently and said, "You'll be all right now."

"Jane!" came a joyful shout, and she saw the little group hurrying toward her. "We've all been so worried," cried Clayton, "but here you are safe and sound!"

"Yes, thanks to Mr. —" She turned around to introduce Tarcan, but he was gone.

The others gathered around her, and old Professor Potter pressed her to his trembling breast, murmuring, "My child! My child!"

"But where is D'Arnot?" Clayton said suddenly.

"I don't understand—isn't Monsieur D'Arnot here?"

In a few words they explained what had happened, and Clayton, recollecting himself with a start, drew out his pistol and fired it repeatedly into the air. The echoes of the reports

died away into silence. "He will hear the signal and come," said Clayton.

"But what if he does not? Suppose something dreadful has happened to him. Oh, dear, and it would be my fault!"

Tarcan, who had been listening in the shelter of the trees, turned and walked away from the camp. He did not know this D'Arnot, but Jane was concerned about him, and that was enough. He found the Frenchman's footprints quickly in the soft earth along the stream, and followed them. He saw where Jane had turned aside, and how the Frenchman, missing the almost imperceptible traces of her passage, had continued along the bank. By late afternoon, moving more swiftly and surely than D'Arnot had, he had found the latter's dead campfire. Pausing only to eat a can of beans, he pressed on. The sun was low when he stepped into a clearing and beheld an appalling sight. The man he sought was in the act of toppling from a tree, while a slavering coyote advanced toward him.

With Tarcan, to think was to act. As he ran forward, he drew his clasp knife from his pocket and opened the deadly blade. The great beast turned at his approach and launched itself in a snarling attack. The impact bowled Tarcan over, but even as he fell beneath the weight of the ferocious beast, his knife drank deep. With a shuddering convulsion, the coyote fell dead.

He found D'Arnot unconscious beneath the tree, with a great bloody welt on his forehead. Tarcan dragged him out of the underbrush carefully, and made sure he had no broken bones; but the blow to his head was injury enough, and it was plain that the man was in no condition to be moved. Tarcan made a bed of branches for the wounded man, built a rude shelter over him, and laid a cold compress on his head. As

evening fell, he butchered the coyote and cooked some of the meat in a tin can; it would make a nourishing stew. The rest of the carcass he carried several hundred yards downstream and tossed into the undergrowth, lest it attract other predators.

That night, indeed, other coyotes found the carcass, tore it apart and dragged the remnants away, so that on the following afternoon, when Clayton and his party reached the spot, they saw that D'Arnot's footprints led to a great bloody smear in the shrubbery. Sadly they returned to their camp, and sadly, two days later, they boarded the rescue train which had been sent by McTaggart.

Meanwhile, D'Arnot lay for two days in delirium while Tarcan patiently nursed him. It was three weeks before the Frenchman was strong enough to travel, and during that time the two men became fast friends. Tarcan showed D'Arnot his treasures, including the locket, the folder with its two photographs, the journal and the children's book. D'Arnot read them with fascination. "But, *mon dieu,*" he exclaimed, "this means that you yourself, and not Clayton, are the heir to millions!"

"That can't be," said Tarcan. "The baby's bones were there."

"Let me see," said the Frenchman, taking the children's book again. "Here are the fingerprints of that baby. Now let us examine yours." Taking a sheet of paper from his pocket, he pressed Tarcan's fingertips upon it one after another. There was no need for ink; Tarcan's fingers were grimy enough. When the task was done, the Frenchman minutely compared the prints with the aid of a pocket magnifying glass. "It is possible," he muttered. "But we must be sure—too much is at stake. Let me borrow this book, my friend, and when we get back to civilization I will show it to a policeman that I know. He will tell us."

A few days later Tarcan pronounced D'Arnot fit to travel, and the two friends retraced their steps to the lonely cabin beside the railroad track. It was empty, but on the desk Tarcan found an envelope bearing his name in a feminine hand. Tearing it open, he read:

> Dear Tarcan,
>
> We all wanted to thank you for your kindness, but the rescue train has arrived and we must go. If you are ever in Boston, please call on me.
>
> Jane Potter.

He showed the note to D'Arnot. "And will you accept the invitation?" the Frenchman inquired.

Tarcan shook his head. "She's rich, and I'm a 'bo."

"My friend, once I was rich too, and if only I had the chest which was stolen from me, there would be plenty for both of us; but, alas—"

"What chest is that?" Tarcan asked abruptly. D'Arnot explained about the chest of gold that had mysteriously disappeared from the train. Tarcan, in turn, told him of the scene he had witnessed. "I dug the chest up and buried it again, like a packrat," he said. "We'll get it, and then you'll be rich."

"*We* shall be rich, *mon ami!* Do you think I spoke in jest? No, half of all I have is yours!"

Tarcan dug up the chest and they set out along the track until they reached the grade, several miles away, where the fast freights slowed down. They boarded the first train and rode it as far as the nearest station, where D'Arnot paid for the rest of their passage to Boston, and also bought a full set of clothing and luggage for each of them. Bathed, shaved, and dressed in

the fashion, Tarcan was, D'Arnot declared, the picture of a gentleman; but his manner left something to be desired.

"Mon Dieu!" the Frenchman remarked, "you must not eat pork chops in your fingers, Tarcan! Do as I do." Tarcan copied him patiently, and soon learned to eat as daintily as any aristocrat.

Arriving in Boston, they found that the Potters had left for their summer cottage in Brattleboro. D'Arnot had business in the city, including a visit to the policeman he had mentioned, but Tarcan could not wait; he hired a car and set out for Vermont.

Jane Potter was in a quandary. Clayton, who had accompanied them to the summer cottage, had been increasingly attentive of late, and she knew, with the intuition of womankind, that he was about to propose. Clayton loved her; he was young, handsome, rich, and he would do his best to make her happy; but her heart was with the strange forest man who had borne her off into the wilderness.

"Dear Jane," Clayton said to her when they were alone that afternoon—"I may call you Jane, mayn't I? You must know, dear, how I feel about you. I want you to marry me. Won't you say yes?"

"Yes," she said.

Afterward, pleading a headache, she retired to her room and waited until the others had gone off on their various errands; then she strolled out of the house into a little wood that ran along the railroad track. The scene reminded her of her forest love, and she wandered deeper into the trees, unaware of the black cloud that hung ominously on the horizon.

When at last she smelled the smoke and saw it drifting

through the trees, it was too late. She stumbled away from the oncoming flames, only to find another line of fire racing across her path. Suddenly she heard her name called; a tall stranger was running toward her. Without a word he caught her up in his arms and bounded back the way he had come.

On the railroad track, a little distance away, stood a small handcar. The stranger deposited her on it without ceremony, climbed aboard himself, and began to pump. It was only then that Jane saw his face clearly. "You!" she said.

"Yes, me, Tarcan."

"And you've saved my life again!" she marveled.

"Not yet," said Tarcan grimly. On both sides of the railway, trees were blazing fiercely; flaming bits of debris rained upon them, and they were blinded by smoke. Then, little by little, the flames receded, and they were hurtling down the track in clear air again.

Near the cottage, Tarcan brought the handcar to a halt and handed Jane down. In a moment he had clasped her in his strong arms. "I love you, Jane," he said. "I want you to be my wife."

Her eyes were downcast. "I am promised to another," she said.

"Clayton?"

"Yes."

"And do you love him?"

"Please don't ask me that."

Back at the cottage, Clayton and Professor Potter received Jane joyfully. They were wonderstruck when Jane introduced Tarcan as the mysterious forest wanderer who had rescued her in the wilderness. Professor Potter stammered his gratitude, and Clayton offered him a cigar.

Shortly thereafter a messenger came to the door with a

telegram. "Why, it's for you," said the Professor in surprise. "Dear me, how did they know you were here?"

"Pardon me," said Tarcan, and ripped the envelope open. The message read:

Fingerprints prove you Clayton heir.
D'Arnot

Tarcan glanced at his cousin, who was pouring himself a whiskey and soda at the sideboard. Clayton was handsome, well-groomed, and soft; he had never boarded a moving freight in his life, or faced the charge of an enraged coyote. With a word, Tarcan could take away his fortune, and his woman as well.

"I say," Clayton smiled, crossing the room to him. "This is all very extraordinary, you know. How did you come to be in that wilderness in the first place, if you don't mind my asking?"

Tarcan folded the telegram and put it in his pocket. "I was born there," he said deliberately. "My mother was a giant hobo; I never knew my father."

LA RONDE

He felt that he was gone a long time, and when he came back from wherever it was, he found himself sitting on a stone, gazing at a wrecked automobile that was tilted upside down against a tree. One of the front wheels was lazily turning. The door on the driver's side hung open; below it the whole top of the car had been crushed flat, and it seemed to him a miracle that anyone had got out alive.

There was a buzzing in his head, but he stood up and went closer to the wreck to see if anyone needed help. The car was empty. What could have become of the driver?

For that matter, what was he himself doing here? Perhaps it would come back to him in a minute, when he was rested. He went all around the car with a kind of dumb obstinacy, through brush that whipped his legs under his coat. No one was there.

Above him there was a broad muddy swath, littered with glass, bits of chrome, and more incongruous things—scattered pieces of white tissue, sunglasses, a pack of cigarettes. He climbed, helping himself up from one sapling to another, until he reached the highway, where he stood

looking uncertainly around him. There were long black skid marks on the macadam. The road made a curve here, and on the opposite side the slope resumed, rising another hundred feet against the gray sky. It was very cold.

He peered down the slope again, thinking that from this elevation he might be able to see the body of the driver, but he could barely make out the wreck itself through the screen of branches.

Although he could not think very clearly because of the continuous dull buzzing in his head, he knew that he ought to report the accident, and he trudged out around the curve in the direction the car had been going. The road straightened here for a distance of half a mile or so; it was empty and gray under the sky, with the gloomy forested slope on one side and the ravine on the other. There were no highway signs, no billboards, nothing to tell him where he might be.

The road ran on, empty and cold under the gray sky. The forested hill was behind him now and on either side were bare fields. A few flakes of snow came drifting along; they melted at once on the highway. Then the snow came more thickly and made a white film in which he left a trail of glistening footprints. For some reason this alarmed him, but when he looked back after a few minutes, he saw that the prints were rapidly being covered.

He went on, with the snow whipping into his eyes, until he came to a private road with a chain across it. He ducked under the chain. The road went up steeply, covered with dead leaves and fallen branches. Over the crest of the rise, it ran straight between fields grown up with tall weeds to a white house on a hill. While he was climbing the slope he had been sheltered a little from the wind-driven snow, but now it flew at him again. As he approached the house he could see that the windows were boarded up. The big front door had a

padlock on it. He went around the house and found the back door padlocked too.

As he stood under the eaves to get out of the wind, he noticed an oblong pit covered by a framework of metal bars next to the foundation. He crouched over it and tugged at the framework; the metal was rusted and heavy, but it came up. He laid it aside. When he had cleared out the dead leaves and spruce needles underneath, he found, as he had guessed, that the pit was a light-well for a cellar window. He pulled up the hinged window, crawled through and dropped into musty darkness.

The light from the cobwebbed glass was water-gray, but it was enough to show him the wooden steps that led up to a trap-door. When he raised the trap, he found himself in a long gray room illuminated only by a watery glow at one of the windows. It was cold—colder, it seemed, than the outdoors. His ghostly breath rose in the air.

There was firewood and kindling in a box beside the old-fashioned cookstove, but not a scrap of paper, though he opened one drawer after another and lighted matches to look in. In one of the drawers he found the stub of a candle, and with this in his shivering hand he went through a pantry into a dining room, and from there into a library. Even here there were no newspapers, only the moldy-apricot-colored leather books in the glass-fronted bookcases. He retreated into the kitchen, and this time opened the doors of cabinets, where he found brittle shelf paper under the heavy old plates and tumblers. He pulled out a few pieces of this, and presently had a fire going in the stove.

The tall wooden icebox was empty, but he found peaches in a glass jar in the pantry. The jar was like none he had ever seen; it had a glass top held down by two jointed handles, and a red rubber gasket between jar and lid. He stood beside the stove,

which was now radiating an almost imperceptible warmth, and ate the peaches with a cold metallic-tasting spoon.

There was a kerosene lamp on the kitchen table; he filled it from a can he found in the pantry and lighted it. It smoked at first, blackening the inside of the glass chimney, until he found out how to adjust and trim the wick. Carrying the lamp, he mounted the back stairway and found two bedrooms. The beds had been stripped, but the mattresses, covered with coarse gray-striped twill, remained. He dragged one of them down the stairs to the kitchen; there, in front of the stove, he stretched out in his clothes and fell asleep.

The cold woke him early in the morning; the fire had gone out. He built it up again, ate the rest of the peaches for breakfast, and then set out to explore the house. All the furniture was Victorian, even the pieces that looked almost new. Under the high crossbeamed ceiling hung a black wrought-iron chandelier with candles in it. Kerosene lamps with painted china shades were on all the tables. The living room, dining room, and library had fireplaces, red brick in the living room, green tile in the other two; there were fireplaces in two of the upstairs bedrooms as well. Two other upstairs rooms had doors which he could not open.

He went down again to forage in the pantry. He found sacks of flour and cornmeal, cans of condensed milk, oil and lard, and jar after jar of preserved fruit and vegetables. There was plenty of wood stacked on the porch and in the yard.

With tools he found in the cellar he pried loose the staple that held the padlock on the back door, so that he could go in and out freely while leaving the door apparently still locked. Gray smoke ascended from the kitchen chimney; he could not help that, but the sky was so overcast, although it was no longer snowing, that he thought the smoke would not be seen.

With flour, water and condensed milk he mixed a batter and made pancakes. There was even a whole cheese, not very moldy; he cut off the bad part and ate a wedge with his pancakes.

Afterward he made fires in all the fireplaces downstairs. He fed them until they roared in the chimneys, but the stubborn cold of the house yielded slowly. Even when he sat in a wing chair with his feet on the hearth, he could feel the insistent chill probing at his back.

All through the house, the firelight sent shadows racing up the walls. These shadows disturbed him, and he went to work filling the oil lamps, trimming and adjusting their wicks.

Nowhere in the house was there any electrical appliance: no lights, no television, not even a radio. There were no newspapers, and no magazines except for the bound volumes of *Harper's* and *The Century* in the library. Even the bathroom fixtures were old; the shower (which did not work) was a vast sunflower-head of metal suspended on a stalk over the claw-footed bathtub. In the mahogany medicine cabinet he found bone toothbrushes with black hog-bristles, and medicines in plain brown bottles with paper labels: ipecac, calamine. Yet he knew that the house could not have been abandoned for more than a year or two; there was dust everywhere, but only a light film, not the accumulation of a century. Moreover, it was curious, in a house with so much food in it, that there was no sign of rats.

He was reluctant to damage anything in the house, but in the end his curiosity won out, and he forced the two locked doors upstairs. Behind one of them was a lumber room, choked with bedsteads, sofas, chairs, all dusty and soiled, but modern in appearance. The second room had been fitted out as an office, with an oak desk, a leather armchair, and an ancient Royal typewriter, the kind with

a little glass window in the side through which part of the works could be seen.

Beside the typewriter lay a sheaf of manuscript. The first few words caught his eye, and he sat down to read.

My maternal great-grandfather built his house on a terrace at the foot of a wooded hill in Potamos Township, near the New York and New Jersey borders of Pennsylvania in what they now call the "Tri-States" area. Behind the house there are seven Norway spruces, of which the tallest is about eighty feet; the ground beneath them is carpeted with brown needles, and the wind moves quietly through their branches. Farther up the hill are Scotch pines, native spruces and firs, maples, and birch. Still farther up, a mile or so above the house, there is an old logging road, now grown up in maple saplings, and above that the foundations of a settler's cabin, the stones barely visible in the underbrush. Except for these, and a power line that crosses the hill, there is no sign of human habitation.

The house itself is of white-painted frame and shiplap construction, three stories tall, with dormers, a veranda and an Italian slate roof. Over the years it has settled, having been built without footings, as the custom then was, but the frame is sturdy; I remember that an electrician who was called in to wire the house, when I was a boy, complained that he had to drill through innumerable "cats," diagonal framing members which united the studs.

The downstairs rooms are paneled in golden oak; the floors are parquet. All the rooms, even the old servants' quarters on the third floor, are ample in size; the living room ceiling is eighteen feet high, and the rest fifteen. These high ceilings make the house "hard to heat," as the local expression has it, but they give a sense of spaciousness and

a quality of sound entirely different from that in "modern" cheap-jack houses. It is a soothing and relaxing ambience, a feeling of permanence and safety, which must be experienced to be appreciated.

When I saw the house again, after the death of my aunt Margaret in 1978, the silences of the vast rooms seemed to speak of boyhood pleasures. I am half-convinced that houses somehow soak up psychic experiences of their inhabitants; there are certain houses which have a mean-spirited or discouraged air, and there are city apartments that seem to radiate a sense of irritability, as if the walls still contained the last echoes of an angry shout.

My aunt Margaret, who had lived in this house since I was a boy, and to whom my parents willed the possession and use of the property during her lifetime, was, I now think, a kindred soul; we were alike at least in that each of us was happiest in a state of nonmatrimony. When I was a child, however, I disliked and feared her, because she sometimes seemed aware of my existence and sometimes not.

It was she who had redecorated the house and covered all the sofas with chintz, hung "modern" pictures and strewn the coffee tables with cigarette boxes and French novels. Yet even her old age and illness seemed to have left no psychic traces in this house. The walls, the cornices, the mantelpieces seemed to say, "Here we are, as we have always been. Why have you stayed away so long?"

I must add that although there were no ghosts in the house itself, the cellar was another matter. It was irregular and low, angling around a huge stone that had been too big for the excavators to remove; to reach it, one went down through a trap in the kitchen and then had to walk stooping along a sort of cobwebbed passageway to reach the farther room where the furnace was. In this chamber, so long as the

light was on, I felt no uneasiness, but in the stifling dark something was there, some malevolent and incoherent impulse that was older than the house.

Against the well-meant advice of my friends, I settled my affairs in New York, retired from my practice, sold most of my furniture, and disposed of my lease. In September I moved into the old house. A local woman, Mrs. Beveridge, helped me set the place to rights. I gathered that she was a recent widow, in straitened circumstances; I asked her to stay on as my housekeeper, and she agreed.

Mrs. Beveridge was a woman of perhaps fifty, sturdily built, with pale skin and dark hair which she wore in an old-fashioned bun. Her husband, whom she rarely mentioned, had been a carpenter or roofer or something of that sort; she herself had had little education, but she had a high degree of native intelligence and had formed her mind by reading. I felt myself lucky to have her, not only because of her efficiency in caring for the house, but because there was no suggestion on either side of any sexual innuendo between us. She spoke little, in a quiet voice, and adapted her habits perfectly to mine. When I wanted her for any reason she was there; when I wished to be alone she effaced herself. In the evenings she retired to her room on the third floor, where I sometimes heard her radio playing softly.

In November an early storm knocked down power lines and left us without light or heat. Mrs. Beveridge kindled fires in the fireplaces and kept the wood range going in the kitchen; I got out the kerosene lamps which were kept for such emergencies, and we ate by candlelight. During the four days of the storm, I became accustomed to the soft light of lamps and candles and grew to like it. When the power came back on, I discovered that I was actually disappointed. The electric lights seemed cold and impersonal; they revealed too

much; I preferred the warm brown darkness, the mystery. I continued to use the lamps; Mrs. Beveridge appeared to have no objection.

With her help, I carried down some pieces of furniture abandoned years ago in the attic. The marble-topped dressers and tables were as sound as ever; the chairs and love seats, of course, were upholstered in horsehair, impossibly hard to sit on, and the leather was cracked and peeling. As soon as I was able, I got an upholsterer in Stroudsburg to come out and take these pieces away for refinishing. I had them done in rose and blue plush, or rather mohair, a deep-piled fabric. When they were brought back and arranged in the living room, the remaining modern pieces looked all the more out of place. One by one I got rid of them. At the Auction Barn, so-called, on the Port Jervis road I found a huge icebox and two large copper washtubs. I consulted Mrs. Beveridge about each of these changes, half-expecting her to demur since they involved more labor for her, but she expressed her entire satisfaction, and indeed, I often heard her singing quietly at her work. At last, more than nine months after I had begun, I was able to look about me and see nothing whatever that had been made later than the year 1910. I had, of course, canceled my subscriptions to all newspapers and magazines. Our supplies were delivered in bulk by a Mr. Thomas and stored by Mrs. Beveridge.

From a dealer in Stroudsburg I acquired a parlor organ in fair condition. It had not been converted to motorized operation, as so many old organs have; the bellows was cracked, however, and some of the padding under the keys was worn away. When it was restored, it functioned perfectly. The organ had a keyboard of two and a half octaves, and with the use of various stops ("Tremolo," "Celeste," "Vox Humana," and the like) it could produce an

astonishing variety of pleasant sounds. I made some effort to learn this instrument, and amused myself with it sometimes when Mrs. Beveridge was at her work, but she was so much better at it than I that in the evenings I merely sat and listened to her play. We had a music book, published in the 1880s, which contained some charming things of Schubert's, as well as some sacred music and even a few popular songs.

I discovered in myself an insatiable appetite for Victorian literature—novels, miscellanies, journals. That spring I haunted the antique shops and secondhand stores around Potamos. One of my prizes was a leather-bound set of Dickens, published in 1878, with the original illustrations; another was a work entitled *Dr. Hood's Plain Talks and Common Sense Medical Adviser,* a quaint heavy volume which recommended prussic acid for stomach ulcers, and cocaine for heroin addiction. As for health care, I knew quite well that if I became seriously ill I should have to seek modern medical treatment, but my health was good as long as I took care not to overstrain my heart, and Mrs. Beveridge was never ill.

I was aware that the Victorian life I was attempting to re-create within these walls was not the reality. The songs of Victorian men and women were not all decorous, nor were all their habits nice. A real Victorian bachelor in my situation would long before now, in all probability, have undone the laces of his housekeeper's underwear. No, it was not the real Victorian world that I was attempting to re-create, but my boyhood's imaginary world of safety, serenity, and gentleness.

I confess that I was as much alarmed as pleased by the alacrity with which Mrs. Beveridge fell in with my scheme. Never once did she suggest even by a smile or a gesture that what we were doing was absurd. She seemed to take it all as

perfectly normal, and it was this that alarmed me. Either we were falling together into a folie a deux, or she was humoring me, with consummate skill, for some motive of her own which I could not guess.

At any rate, the life we now began to lead was so pleasant that I ceased to question it. In the mornings, in fine weather, I tended my garden; in the afternoons I worked in my study, and in the evenings Mrs. Beveridge and I decorously diverted ourselves. On fair days the house was sunny, and the porch pillars, which I could see through the glass pane of the door at the far end of the living room, gave back the pure essence of light. But it is the winter evenings that I remember with more pleasure, when the whole world was shut out in darkness, and the lamps were surrounded by a brown gloom.

With the aid of an old book of parlor tricks and games, Mrs. Beveridge and I relearned the art of the cat's cradle, forming more and more intricate figures with a loop of string. Beginning with the Cat's Cradle, we went on to the Calm Sea, the Upturned Cradle, the Mattress Turned Over, the Cat's Eye, the Pig on the Pegs. We also played at making hand shadows on the wall: the Bird in Flight, the Tortoise, the Goose a Prisoner (in which one hand grips the wrist of the other which forms the goose), and so on; we played word games, at which Mrs. Beveridge was very good, and sometimes Anagrams, Scat, or Old Maid.

I counted, I say, on the fact that I was completely aware of my own deepening obsession, but this belief was shaken one morning, when, arising earlier than usual, I went down to the kitchen to see if there was any coffee. It was about seven o'clock; the day was clear, and the sunlight reflecting from the white snow gave a shimmer to the atmosphere. Mrs. Beveridge was nowhere in sight, but a man in a long coat was carrying a sack up the steps of the back porch to the pantry.

At first I thought it was Mr. Thomas; then I saw that he was an older and stouter man, and when he shifted his burden noticed that he was wearing a long brown apron under his coat. He turned and stumped down the stairs again, and as I went to another window to watch him, I distinctly saw him get up on the driver's seat of a wagon drawn by two massive horses. I saw the wagon move off down the driveway; then it was gone.

When Mrs. Beveridge came in a few minutes later, I asked her, "Who was here just now?"

"Why, Mr. Thomas," she replied, and gave me such a puzzled look that I could not say any more.

One of our evening amusements was the Ouija board. Mrs. Beveridge was very adept at this, and under her fingertips the planchette swept rapidly about the board, spelling out ambiguous communications from various defunct notables (Napoleon informed us, for instance, that he did not like fish).

I soon noticed that she could manipulate the planchette by herself, and it was not long before I discovered that she often went into light trance while doing so. This gave me the notion of trying to deepen the trance, to which she readily assented, and I found her to be an excellent subject; after a few sessions she exhibited all the classical signs of deep trance: catalepsy, glove anesthesia, amnesia, hallucination, and all the rest. I was able to suggest to her that her hand would write automatically, a procedure less tiresome than the Ouija board. While she sat with her eyes closed, the pencil in her fingers traced large, childish letters, only a dozen or so to a page. When her pencil slipped off the edge of the paper she seemed to know it, and after a moment's hesitation would begin a new line; when she reached the bottom of the paper I lifted her hand, put a fresh sheet under

it, and she began where she had left off, even if it were in the middle of a word.

When I say that her writing was childish I mean to be understood literally; not only were the letters large and painfully formed, but the *t*'s were often uncrossed and there were many misspellings, "annd" for "and," for example, and "pulleded" for "pulled." The lines sloped more and more downward as she wrote, and that seemed curious to me, because she was right-handed. When something agitated her, as when I asked her to describe a dream she had had the night before, her writing grew more irregular and the lines sometimes ran into each other.

These sessions were tiring to her, but she was as interested by their results as I was, and we performed them at least two or three times a week for a considerable period. We had been able to dispense with hypnotic induction entirely, by the use of posthypnotic suggestion; after having settled herself comfortably, on a word of command, she would go promptly into deep trance and begin to write. Ordinarily I would suggest a topic, but on several occasions she produced rather surprising things without any prompting from me. Her most elaborate effort was a narrative which she produced in the course of five consecutive sessions. In each case I woke her after three quarters of an hour, and on the following evening I suggested to her that she would go on with the narrative until it was done. The transcript which follows is verbatim except for the correction of errors in spelling, the elimination of repetitions, etc.

Some people seem to be born with a taste for violence. One of these was a man named Norman Edwards, who lived with his wife Sally in a hillside house in a suburb of Newark, New Jersey. The living room and master bedroom were

upstairs, the kitchen, family room, and spare bedroom were down. Edwards, who worked as an insurance underwriter in Newark, was a man in his thirties, pale, horse-faced, deceptively slender. His hands were large, and he enjoyed using them.

One Saturday morning in early October he was taking down the screens on the side of the house when he heard the water hiss in the upstairs bathroom. Sally had slept late that morning. Edwards raised the window quietly and put his head in. He saw her body moving against the blue shower curtain in the tub. He leaned in over the windowsill, stretched as far as he could, and grabbed her leg. He heard a shriek and a thump. He waited, but the water kept on running. "Sally?" he said. She did not answer.

He climbed in the window and twitched the shower curtain aside. She was lying in the tub with her yellow shower cap on. A little blood from her nose was washing away in pink trails. He turned off the water and pulled her upright. Her eyes were open, but she looked stuporous.

He had her dressed by the time the doctor came; by then her nose was beginning to swell. It was broken, as it turned out, and they kept her in the hospital overnight to see if she had a concussion. When Edwards saw her the next day there was a red and purple bruise spreading out from under the bandage, and she had two beautiful shiners. "It was just a joke, Sally," he said, but she turned her head away.

That afternoon her sister Wanda came over. "Sally sent me for some things." She walked past him up the stairs.

"They going to keep her? I thought she was getting out today." Edwards followed her.

"That's it. Some complications," Wanda said. She opened a suitcase on the bed and began pulling things out of bureau

drawers. When she had finished packing the suitcase, she started on another.

"She doesn't need all that in the hospital," Edwards said.

"She might," Wanda said. She lifted the two suitcases and walked past him.

He caught up with her downstairs and crowded her against the wall. "You're lying, aren't you?" he said. "She isn't coming home."

"That's right," Wanda said, "and *listen to me,* you bastard, if you lay a hand on me, Morris will kill you. Now get out of my way."

After a moment he stepped back, and she carried the suitcases down to her car, got in and drove off.

When he thought about the incident, Edwards realized that he was hearing in his mind the sound Sally's nose had made when it hit the water faucet, a sort of crunching *click.* He had not actually heard the sound, but it was perfectly clear to him, and he found himself playing it over and over, each time with the same little stab of pleasure.

It was not a complete surprise to him that he felt this way. Once, as a boy, he had hit his older brother Tim with a baseball bat, and he had heard the same sort of sound—a *thud,* with a sharp little *crack* in the middle of it when Tim's collarbone had broken.

Edwards called Wanda's number several times, hoping Sally would answer the phone, but it was always Wanda or Morris, and they told him Sally didn't want to talk to him. Twice he went to their house and made a nuisance of himself. On the day after the second of these visits, when Wanda had threatened to call the police, Morris Hollander came to see Edwards. Hollander, Sally's sister's husband, was a prosperous man who had business interests up and down New Jersey. He was much older than Wanda, at least sixty,

but he was still trim and erect. His sleek hair was not white, not gray, but something in between, and he wore emerald cuff links.

"Hello, Morris, what do you want?" Edwards said.

"You can't invite me in? We have to talk on the doorstep?"

"All right," said Edwards, and led the way upstairs to the living room.

Hollander laid his hat carefully on the sofa, but he did not sit down or take off his black overcoat. "Norman," he said, "I'll put the whole thing in a nutshell. You're making Sally nervous, she don't want to see you, so what good is it? Save the aggravation."

"Sally is my wife," Edwards said.

"O.K., why not treat her like a wife? Arguments I understand, believe me, and even to hit someone I understand, but to break your wife's nose—this I don't understand."

"It was an accident."

"So? A woman is taking a shower, you reach through the window and grab her leg—this is an accident? If you're walking down the street, I throw a banana peel under your foot, you fall and break your hip—this is also an accident?"

The old man took a turn around the room. "I was married to my first wife, she should rest in peace, twenty-seven years. To me a divorce is a shame. But I wouldn't say to Sally, go back to him, your place is with your husband. It's better she shouldn't have more accidents."

He turned and gave Edwards one level look. "So, now I said what I came to say. Don't make no more trouble. Good-bye, Norman."

Edwards was thinking about the phrase, "fall and break your hip," and in the plosive of the last word he seemed

to hear the faint sound of a breaking bone. As Hollander started down the stairs, he said, "Morris."

The old man half-turned, taking his hand off the banister. "Yes?"

"Go to hell." Edwards kicked him hard in the chest. The old man fell backwards and clattered down the stairs. When Edwards got to him, he was lying against the wall with his neck bent, and he was dead.

Edwards knelt, got his arms under the body, hoisted it to his chest with an effort, and stood. As he carried it through the kitchen, the phone began to ring. He put his foot on a chair, steadied the body with his knee and one arm, picked up the receiver. "Hello."

"Norman, this is Wanda. Excuse me for calling, but is Morris there?"

"Morris? No," he said, speaking over the dead man's face. "Why would he be here?"

"Well, he said he was going to stop by on his way home from Sparta. Anyway, if he comes over there, would you please ask him to call me?"

"Sure. 'Bye."

He put the receiver down, hoisted the body chest-high again, and went out to the driveway where Morris's big blue Lincoln was parked. He toppled the body gently into the trunk head-first, moved the heavy arm that seemed to want to cling to him, then folded the legs. He explored the pockets gingerly for car keys, found them, and stepped back.

The body lay on its side, one arm underneath. By the time he got where he was going, it would be stiff; it might be harder to get out of the trunk. He bent the legs upward as far as he could, folded the arm. The other one was too hard to get at; this would have to do. What else? The hat. Where was the hat?

Edwards went back through the kitchen, glancing at the phone, but it did not ring. He found Morris's hat under the little table at the foot of the stairs, hiding there like a black animal. He put it on top of the body in the trunk, closed the lid, and went back inside for his jacket and topcoat. When he pulled out onto the street, it was just after two o'clock.

The day was cold and bright, the road clear; most of the traffic was coming the other way. According to the map, there were three or four lakes and reservoirs not far from U.S. Route 206. Edwards drove steadily north, keeping just under the speed limit. The car handled well. At Netcong he turned northeast to have a look at Lake Hopatcong. The approaches were too shallow, and there were too many trailers parked on the shore. He kept going around the lake, then northwest again to Lake Mohawk, but it did not suit him, either. He drove through Newton, Lafayette, and Augusta. North of Branchville there was a turnoff marked "Culvers Lake." Edwards kept on going. He realized now that the Jersey lakes would not do. He was close to the state line already; somewhere along the Delaware there would be a private place where he could tip the car down into deep water. Then he would walk or hitchhike to the nearest town, stay in a motel overnight, and take the bus home in the morning.

North of Dingmans Ferry the map showed the highway running close to the river, and he glimpsed it, or thought he did, occasionally through the trees, but there was no good approach. The sky had turned gray; there were a few flakes of snow. He turned on his headlights. A curve came up, too fast. As he swung around it, braking, two yellow-white eyes leaped into view, the headlights of another car. He turned frantically, saw the lights blaze up, felt a hammering jolt. Then things began to become very queer.

THE CAGE

James Michael McCabe got out of bed late one January evening, looked at himself in the mirror, and realized he was never going to be rich. No one would ever say, "There goes Jim McCabe—one of the wealthiest men in town, but a great guy."

In youth his face had been roundish; not quite enough jaw, perhaps, but open and friendly, a face you could trust. Now it was becoming square: the soft ridges prolonging themselves down his cheeks, jowls relaxing, as if the face were trying with hopeless ineptitude to fit itself into a cube.

While he shaved, McCabe tried to puzzle out how it had happened. By this time he ought to be cruising around Europe, meeting famous people, eating superb meals, drunk every afternoon. Time was accelerating, that was the trouble, like a great noiseless wheel. He bent down to tie his shoelace, and when he straightened up he was fifty-four, a postal clerk in Eugene, Oregon, and it was too late.

He realized that he had been holding this knowledge back for months; now, while he slept, it had poked its head out

with a yellow-toothed grin. He dressed, made the bed under the plastic crucifix on the wall, went downstairs.

Bonnie was in the kitchen getting his breakfast ready. "Hi, honey," she said. "Eggs over?"

"Okay." McCabe sat down at the dinette and drank his orange juice. Presently Bonnie brought him the eggs and two strips of bacon winking with fat on a paper towel. She poured coffee and sat down across from him, a neat, stocky woman wearing an apricot blouse and the pants of her blue suit. Her eyes were tired under the makeup.

"Hard day?" he asked.

"Uh-huh. That woman Mrs. Prescott—that I told you about?—she came back today and wanted to look at *every one* of the houses we looked at Monday. And she still couldn't make up her mind."

"Some people." McCabe scraped up the last of his egg with a piece of toast. He kissed Bonnie, put on his windbreaker, picked up the lunch box, and went out into the cold dark.

Bonnie's car, kept in the garage, was a two-year-old white Buick, used to impress clients. McCabe's daily transportation was a rust-colored VW beetle, seven years old, with a bumper sticker that read, "OLD RAILFANS NEVER DIE, THEY JUST LOSE TRACK." He started the engine and nursed it a few minutes until it stopped gasping. When he pulled out of the carport, he saw that the kitchen windows were already black.

It was ten to twelve by the time he got to River Road; the sun was on the other side of the world, over the Indian Ocean somewhere. A little rain mixed with sleet was spitting out of the black sky when McCabe turned onto the Belt Line. The cars ahead were like doomed moths racing after the headlights.

He found himself thinking, If only I hadn't married Bonnie, and felt sick. She had stood by him when he had to leave the police force in 'sixty-four, and McCabe was sure it had never entered her mind that he might have been guilty, or partly guilty, of what they had accused him of. With her help he had worked himself out of debt, but there was nothing left over. In five years he could retire on his pension, and then what?

He got into line at the entrance to the lot, parked beside Red Myers' glossy Pontiac, and followed the crowd into the building. The Eugene Mail Processing Facility, built in 1978, was about the size of a city block; most of its interior space was one gigantic mail-sorting room. Except for the ceiling fluorescents, which were a kindly yellow-white, not the mercury vapor that made you look like a corpse with purple-ink veins, it was not all that much different from an aircraft factory. Under the ceiling, the room was crisscrossed by enclosed walkways painted cream and blue, with tilted blank squares of glass at intervals—the inspectors' chicken runs. The blue horizontal stripe emphasized the walkways: you were not supposed to forget they were there.

At the time clock, Phil Zurcher came up to him with a clipboard in his hand. Zurcher was the supervisor, a skinny, popeyed man, always on the move. "Mac, I'm putting you in the cage this shift—Ted isn't coming in."

"He sick again?"

"No, it's his wife—had to take her to the hospital."

"Oh. Okay."

McCabe went into the cage, a twenty-foot enclosure of green-painted metal mesh at the end of the room. It was the high-security area of the Facility, an inner fortress. When the first truckload came in from Portland, McCabe signed for the pouch and opened it. Letters, mostly, registered

just for proof of delivery, but here were four long brown envelopes from the Portland branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, addressed to the main branches of the three major Eugene banks. If you knew what the fees were, you could read the value of the contents from the machine-stamped postage in the corner of each envelope. One of them, for instance, was for $11.55. Subtracting twenty cents for letter postage, that meant the sender had declared a value of over $25,000.

Taking the four envelopes together, there was more than a hundred thousand dollars' worth of something—probably negotiable Federal securities. And the postage on them told how much they were worth. It was like a label that said, "Take me."

The trouble was that all registered mail traveled in a special pouch, secured by a brass padlock with a little window that showed how many times the lock had been opened. Everybody who handled it had to sign a form showing the number in the rotary lock, the serial number of the lock, and the registry numbers of the mail.

McCabe imagined himself flying over the Atlantic with the booty in his pocket, cool and clean in his new clothes, feeling a sweet sense of relief and regret to be leaving his whole life behind, graciously accepting a martini from the stewardess, an Amazonian blonde in a red jumper. A voice from the loudspeaker: "This is your captain. We are now at our cruising altitude of thirty-two thousand feet, and we have a little tail wind; we should be landing in Paris at approximately nine-twenty p.m."

They would be waiting for him, of course, two hard-eyed gentlemen from the Sûreté. "Monsieur McCabe? Please come with us." They would send him back and put him in a federal prison for ten or fifteen years.

As he passed the rumble of the sorting machines on his way to the men's room, McCabe saw there was a new girl on Console 11, sitting there with earphones on her head, listening to music like all the others—watching the machine where the envelopes came down *zip* one every second. She was slender and pale, pink-lipped; he could see the shape of her blue-jersey breasts.

That was another thing: he was getting horny for young women. In twenty years he had never been bothered much, but lately it was as if they had sprung up out of the pavement, a fresh creation, with their long flexible backs and narrow waists, their bifid bottoms in blue jeans, their funny shoes. When he remembered them, it was not their faces or bosoms that he thought about, but the sweet curve of waist and hip.

He saw her again as he went into the lunchroom about four o'clock; she was sitting with two other young women drinking Cokes and eating potato chips. McCabe got coffee out of the coin machine and sat down in his usual place with Red Myers and Lloyd Shank.

Red Myers was short and soft; his hair was no longer red but yellowish white, and his eyelashes were almost invisible. "It seems there's this mail order outfit in Portland," he was saying. "They sell body-building courses, you know, to young kids. Well, see, he'd watch for envelopes addressed to them, and when he spotted one that looked fat, he'd stick it under his sweater, go to the john, and he'd take the money out and flush the envelope down the toilet."

"Who's this?" McCabe asked, unwrapping an egg sandwich.

"Remember the skinny guy, Andy—the mail handler? Transferred to Portland last fall?"

McCabe thought a minute. "Curly hair."

"That's him. The inspectors got him up in Portland

Friday. Two of them jumped out, grabbed his arms, and hustled him into the office. That was the last of him."

"I didn't see anything in the papers," said Lloyd.

"No, and you won't, either. They hush those things up."

Driving home in water-agate daylight, McCabe listened to country-western music on KEED. *"What makes you say you're all alone, when you're all alone with me-e-e?"*

The images in his head were brighter and more real than the landscape. He was in Paris, in his own luxurious apartment, lying on cool sheets, and in the lamplit dimness a slender young woman was bending over him. A pendant on a gold chain hung before her hanging breasts. McCabe pulled her closer, and he took the pendant slowly between his lips....

He pulled in under the carport and turned off the ignition; the engine dieseled a little and died. The old house looked naked in the daylight that exposed its peeling window-frames and the cobwebs on the cellar windows. McCabe went into the living room and sat on the couch. The morning light showed every nick on the end tables, every dusty lampshade. He looked at the discount-store panther, painted on black velvet in phosphorescent purple, green and white, that hung on the wall over the television. The painting was framed in the same distressed oak that the furniture was made of, and had come from the same store.

He got up again, went through the kitchen and down the cellar stairs, turning on the lights as he went. The familiar shapes of his model train layout and workbenches greeted him. They were just as he left them; Bonnie never came down here.

McCabe did not look at the unfinished Pere Marquette locomotive on the bench. He sat for a minute without moving, then pulled a scratch pad toward him and began to draw a sketch of the rotary Postal Service lock. It was a little

brass padlock, smaller than the kind you would put on a garage door, but much more carefully made. On one side near the top there was a tiny glass window with four numbers showing under it. Every time anybody opened the lock, the numbers advanced by one digit, just like the odometer on a car. And that was the problem, because you couldn't get at the number wheels inside the lock without taking it apart. And you couldn't just fake a lock, because each one had a serial number stamped into the brass.

McCabe went upstairs and got a can of beer out of the refrigerator. Vague ideas were tumbling about in his head—a gimmicked lock, with some way of stamping the serial number into the brass at the last minute...that wouldn't work.

He found himself contemplating an absurd vision: a brass postal lock with wheels under it, a cowcatcher on the front and a sand dome on top, rattling around the track. What could that possibly mean? Then he understood, and the can dented suddenly between his fingers.

It was Wednesday, Bonnie's day off. She made hamburgers and a salad—her lunch, his dinner. "I think the world is getting crazier every day," she said. "You remember Marge's friend that I told you about, the one that divorced her husband and moved to Eugene? Well, her husband cut off his *finger* and mailed it to her, can you imagine that?"

"That's against the law," McCabe said.

"Well, I *know*, and besides, think how she felt when she opened the package! Marge says she was in absolute hysterics, they had to put her in the hospital and give her all kinds of sedatives."

"What happened to the guy?"

"Marge says they're still looking for him in Salem."

They went upstairs, and McCabe smoked a cigarette while Bonnie undressed in the bathroom. Later she said sleepily, "You remember the man who wanted to buy that Colburn house? He made an appointment to sign the agreement this morning, and never showed up. Why are people so crazy?"

Ted Voeltz took over the cage again and McCabe went back to sorting mail. The secret he was carrying in his head made him alternately panicky and exultant; he was afraid these emotions were visible in his face, and he kept his head down.

What bothered him most was that the more he thought about his scheme, the more practical it began to appear. The Eugene bank would lose nothing, and neither would the Federal Reserve. The Postal Service would pay for the loss—government paying government, but it all came out of taxes.

Early in February Ted Voeltz was sick again and McCabe went back in the cage. He took a lump of beeswax to work and made an impression of the window frame of a rotary lock. At home, mornings after work, he fashioned a little oblong brass box with rounded corners, a false window frame to fit over the real one. He put a glass window in it, and under that he made a plastic holder with four slots for the numbers; then he began on the numbers themselves, painstakingly stenciled on tiny squares of white plastic. He needed forty of them, ten for each of the four digits of the rotary lock, because the number could be anything from 0000 to 9999.

March came, and the westerly wind began to carry away patches of the cloud-ceiling like scraps of a rotten army blanket. The lawns were alight with daffodils. When McCabe finished the forty number squares, he made a

dispenser to hold them, and practiced with it in his pocket until he could pick out the numbers he wanted by touch and slip them into the holder without error. He burned all his notes, got rid of the scraps of brass, the beeswax, his dies and templates.

One day he drove down to the Mall through a drift of white cherry petals under a gray sky. Bearded young men and long-haired women were blooming around the taco stand. McCabe bought Seattle newspapers in a bookstore and read the death notices until he found one he liked. "Willard (Bill) Buehler, born January 11, 1924 in Elmwood, Illinois, passed away April 9. Rosary Monday, 10 a.m., followed by Mass of Christian Burial, both at St. Benedict's Church. Entombment, Calvary Mausoleum."

McCabe drove up to Cheshire and rented a post office box in the dead man's name. That afternoon, while Bonnie was out, he used her little portable typewriter to write to the King County Records Office, requesting a copy of Buehler's birth certificate, and to the Washington Motor Vehicle Bureau asking for a replacement of his driver's license.

A few weeks later he got these letters back, each with an enclosure telling him the amount of the required fee. He wrote again, and took the letters with him to Cheshire, where he bought postal money orders, put them in the envelopes, and mailed them. In due time he got Buehler's birth certificate and driver's license. He put them in an envelope and tucked them away in an old toolbox under his bench.

At a stationery store downtown he bought adhesive labels and a manila envelope with a self-adhesive flap. He addressed the envelope to himself, using one of the labels, and stuffed it with blank paper. He did not use the self-adhesive flap, but sealed the envelope with tape. He drove up to Portland and mailed the envelope, using more

than enough postage. When it was delivered two days later, he smeared the postmark with ink to make the date illegible, removed the tape and the address label. He replaced this with another label, using a fictitious name and the address of a neighbor. He took the prepared envelope to work and put it away in his locker.

The corner supports for his model railway grid were made of scrap lumber; each consisted of two one-by-sixes, nailed and glued together. McCabe removed one of these, pried the boards apart, cut the nails. He carved out a shallow rectangular space in each board, tapped them together again and replaced the support. Now he was ready.

Friday night Zurcher said to him, "You're working the cage, Mac."

"Ted sick again?"

"No, it's his kid." Zurcher hurried away.

McCabe went to his locker, got the prepared envelope, and hid it under his sweater. Presently the first pouch came in from Portland. McCabe dumped it on the table, spread the envelopes. He saw immediately that there were seven from the Federal Reserve. When he added up the amounts of the postage, his heart began to pound so violently that he thought he might faint. The total valuation of the seven envelopes came to five hundred and seventy thousand dollars.

McCabe waited until he saw Zurcher trotting by toward the men's room, right on schedule. Zurcher's habits were regular; he was good for seven minutes, no more and no less.

In opening the lock, McCabe had advanced the number from 4106 to 4107. Now he took a piece of chamois from his pocket and wiped the lock hurriedly, then closed and opened it once more, advancing the number to 4108, as if somebody had opened the pouch illegally in transit. He felt for the

dispenser in his pocket. Using thumb and forefinger, he got the numbers out one by one and put them into the holder: 4106, the number that agreed with the one on the list. He pressed the holder into the false window frame, brought it out, and pressed it down over the real window on the lock.

Then, pretending to lose his balance, he put out his hand and brushed the envelopes off the table. As he squatted, he pulled the manila envelope out from under his sweater, scooped the seven bank envelopes into it. He peeled the backing off the self-adhesive flap and put it into the envelope, along with the chamois and the number dispenser. He closed and sealed the envelope. Leaving it on the floor, he gathered the rest of the mail and put it back on the table. He picked up the list and turned; as he did so, he kicked the manila envelope across the cage. It skidded through the gap under the door, came to rest in the aisle. Presently someone noticed the envelope, bent to pick it up, carried it out of sight toward the sorters' station. McCabe tried to control his breathing.

He looked at his watch. It was time for Zurcher, and here he came, moving at full speed. "Hey, Phil!"

Zurcher came up to the cage. "Yeah?"

"There's seven pieces missing."

"The hell you say." Zurcher stared at the mail on the table, then trotted around to the door. McCabe opened it.

"Look, twenty-two pieces on the list, and there's only fifteen here."

"Lemme see the lock." Zurcher picked it up, compared it with the list. "Hell, the number is one *short*. Didn't you notice? How the hell could that happen, anyway?"

The number was one short because the fake numbers, unlike the real ones, could not change when the lock was opened. McCabe said, "It was okay when I opened it, Phil, I swear."

Zurcher gave him a cold look. "Okay, wait here while I call the inspectors. Wait a minute, give me your key."

McCabe handed it over; Zurcher locked him in and left.

Zurcher was gone a long time. When he came back, he said, "Okay, Mac, they'll be here in about twenty minutes. They want me to put you in the office meantime." He unlocked the door.

"Phil, I need to go to the can."

"Okay, but I got to search you first."

"What?"

"Sorry, but that's the way it is." Zurcher led him down the hall to the superintendent's office, unlocked the door. "Put all the stuff from your pockets on the desk, okay?"

"I don't get this," said McCabe.

"Just do it."

McCabe pulled change and keys out of his pocket, dropped them on the desk. "Phil, that pouch was short when I opened it." He took out his wallet, checkbook, wads of kleenex, cigarettes.

"I guess it was, but I do what they tell me. Let's have your shoes."

"Shoes!" said McCabe. He could feel himself getting red. "God damn it, Phil."

"Shoes, or no going to the john," said Zurcher.

In silence, McCabe took his shoes off, dropped them on the floor. Zurcher pushed them aside with his foot and said, "Now open your mouth."

"I'll remember this, Phil," said McCabe. He opened his mouth, and Zurcher came close to peer inside.

"Find any mail in there?" McCabe asked. "Any postcards, Phil?"

Zurcher went to the door. "Come on. No, leave the shoes—you can go to the john in your socks."

When they got back, Zurcher picked up the shoes and looked them over. He tried to pry up the insoles with his fingernail, squeezed them with his thumbs. He dropped the shoes on the floor again.

"Can I have those now?" McCabe asked.

"No, wait a while."

McCabe realized that he had never seen Zurcher sitting down before; the man looked awkward and uncomfortable. His face was blotchy, and there was dandruff in his thin hair. Zurcher stared at his hands, crossed his legs, crossed them again the other way.

McCabe felt a spiteful pleasure. "Phil, don't you think you ought to pull out my fillings?"

"Lay off," said Zurcher in a low voice.

There was a tap on the door; Zurcher leaped up and opened it, relieved to be in motion. A square-faced old man came in, nodding pleasantly. Behind him was another man, darker and younger.

"Hello, Mr. Zurcher," said the old man, shaking hands. "Tony, you know Phil Zurcher—" The dark man stepped forward with a pained smile, shook hands with Zurcher, but his eyes were on McCabe. "And this is—?"

"This is McCabe," Zurcher said. "He was the one opened the pouch."

"Oh, I see," said the old man. "Mr. McCabe, my name is Floyd Logan, and this is Tony Aiello." Logan shook McCabe's hand; his palm was huge, soft, and cool. "Well, Mr. McCabe, you understand how it is; when something like this happens, we have to investigate—it's our job." He looked expectant.

"Well, sure," said McCabe.

Logan nodded, pleased. His jowls were heavy; his earlobes and his shapeless nose seemed to have kept on growing when

the rest of him quit. "Phil, I suppose you've searched Mr. McCabe already."

"That's right," said Zurcher.

"And found nothing, is that right? Well, that's good, but if you wouldn't mind, Tony—"

"Pleasure," said Aiello with a tight-lipped smile. He stepped forward and began to pat McCabe up and down. He was more thorough than Zurcher had been. When he was finished, McCabe put his shoes on; then they all went back to the cage and looked at the lock, the pouch, and the fifteen pieces of mail. Logan muttered something to Aiello and they both bent over the lock without touching it. Aiello picked up the lock in a white handkerchief, wrapped it carefully, and put it in his pocket.

"Now, Mr. McCabe—can I call you Jim?" said the old man. "Jim, did you leave the cage at any time after you came on shift?"

"No, sir."

"All right, then, let's see. Tony, you can take that downtown if you would, and if Franklin is there now, you can get the records and bring them back. Phil, if you'd take Jim back to the office, then we'll get started here."

Zurcher closed the door behind him and he heard a key turn in the lock. McCabe sat down in the plastic chair beside the desk, feeling as if he had been running uphill. But nothing had gone wrong, as far as he could see. The only bad thing that could happen would be somebody telling them about finding the envelope on the floor. But they probably wouldn't even think about it: that happened all the time.

After a while McCabe took a stack of old Postal Bulletins out of the bookcase and began reading. Shortly after four o'clock Zurcher opened the door and handed him his lunch box. "You want anything to drink?"

"Hell, yes, and I want to get out of here. What are they doing out there, anyway?" He did not comment on the fact that the lunch box had been locked inside his locker.

"They're turning the place upside down," Zurcher said, with a wry smile. "What do you want, coffee, Coke?"

"Coffee, light, no sugar."

Zurcher brought the coffee, escorted him to the men's room and back to the office, locked him in. McCabe went back to the Postal Bulletin, then to *Your Guide to Better English.*

About seven o'clock Logan and Aiello came in, looking red-eyed. Aiello pulled a chair around and they both sat behind the desk. Logan opened a folder. "Now, Mr. McCabe—Jim—you've been with the post office since nineteen sixty-five, is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were a patrolman in Eugene from 'sixty to 'sixty-four. Why did you leave the police force, Jim?"

"They accused me of taking money from a tavern owner."

"I see, uh-huh. And before that, you worked for Boeing in Seattle, six years. What did you do there?"

"I did wing assembly most of the time."

"What did you do the rest of the time?"

"I started out running a punch press."

"Ever work with brass?" Aiello put in abruptly.

"Brass? No."

"Do you have a workshop at home?"

"Yes."

"What do you do there?"

"Model railroads."

"Model railroads," Aiello repeated. "And you say you don't work with brass?"

"I thought you meant at Boeing."

Aiello reached into his coat pocket and brought out

McCabe's false window frame; he held it between thumb and finger. "Did you make this?"

McCabe's scalp prickled. "No, what is it?" He leaned forward.

"You don't know? Come on, Mr. McCabe."

"It looks like part of a lock," McCabe said. "Is that off the—"

"I'll *show* you what it is," said Aiello in a repressed fury. He brought the rotary lock out of his pocket, fitted the false window frame onto it, held it up. "This is what you say was on the pouch when you got it this morning. Look at it. This part here sticks up twice as high as it should. And you didn't notice that?"

"It looked like any other lock."

Aiello's dark eyes were steady. "What was in those registered envelopes?"

"How would I know?"

"You know, all right, Mr. McCabe."

McCabe felt himself getting red. "Now *wait* a minute," he said. "Let me get this straight. Somebody put that thing on the lock—what, with fake numbers in it, is that it?"

"You catch on fast," said Aiello.

"All right, why me? I'm just the guy that opened the lock."

Logan said gently, "Jim, it could be that you're the one who put that thing on there, to make it look like somebody else did it."

McCabe said, "Oh." After a moment he added, "Well, I didn't."

"Will you take a lie detector test?" Aiello demanded.

"Well, sure—I guess so."

"Good. I'll set it up for, say, two o'clock this afternoon."

McCabe was silent a moment. "Okay," he said, finally, "that'll give me time to talk to my lawyer first."

Aiello stared at him with hatred. "If you didn't do it, why do you need a lawyer?"

"Because you're trying to put me in jail for something I didn't do, you son of a bitch."

Aiello went pale and moved as if to get up. Logan put a hand on his arm. "Nobody talks to me that way." Aiello said. He did not take his eyes off McCabe.

"We're all getting a little too excited," Logan said. "It's understandable. Tony, why don't you wait for me outside for just a minute?"

As he passed McCabe, Aiello stopped and turned. "Let me tell you something," he said in a low voice. "Anybody in the postal service that steals, they are slime, do you hear what I'm saying? They are *slime*." He went out.

Logan rubbed his eyes. "Tony takes things personally," he said.

"What about the guy in Portland? What about the truck driver? Why aren't you trying to find out if they did it?"

"They're doing that in Portland," Logan said patiently. "You see, the thing is, Jim, is it could have been any of the three of you. Now the simplest thing would be if you would help us by taking that test. If you pass it, why, then you're in the clear. I really think you ought to take that test, Jim."

"What if it says I did it when I didn't?"

"Lie detectors don't lie, you know."

"That isn't true. Don't forget, you're talking to an ex-cop."

Logan looked at him steadily for a moment. "I'll try to remember that," he said. He picked up the folder from the desk and went out.

At nine he was back, with a little sheaf of envelopes. McCabe's heart jumped, until he saw that the envelopes were white. "Jim, if you would, open these and let me see what's in them. Then we can let you go."

It was his mail. There were two bills, a catalog, and a letter to Bonnie from her sister in Pocatello.

McCabe opened the envelopes. Logan glanced through them and handed them back. "All right, Jim, thank you. Now, I've talked to Dick Thorton, and he's going to put you on suspension, just for a few days, until we get this cleared up. Here's my card, in case you want to call me."

Zurcher escorted him out of the building. It was a clear, bright day. When he got into his car and drove off, the whole world seemed to break into applause.

There was a note on the refrigerator, held there by a strawberry-shaped magnet: "Missed you this morning. Lunch home about 12:30 OK?" Just before one o'clock, Bonnie came in with her arms full of packages. "Honey, I'm sorry I'm late—there was a sale at the Bon. Wait till you see the blouses I got." She took a closer look at McCabe. "Is anything the matter?"

"Not exactly, but there was some excitement at work this morning." She was round-eyed when he told her about the inspectors, and being searched. "They laid me off, too, and made me open the mail before they gave it to me. Here, this is from your sister."

Bonnie took the envelope without looking. "But how could they think you did it?"

"Only three people could have, and I'm one. They're probably watching the house by now."

"Honey, that's *awful*. No wonder you're upset."

After lunch McCabe prowled the house, too restless to sit still. At five o'clock he took a hot shower and went upstairs. He woke up at midnight when Bonnie got into bed. He lay still until her breathing turned regular and deep; then he got up quietly, shaved, put on dungarees

and a work shirt. He ate breakfast and watched the late movie on television.

When he stepped out the back door, the air pressed itself around him like damp tissue paper. It was not as dark as he had expected; the glare from the railroad yards, one vast pink petal, spread across the sky. Tree toads were crick-cracking somewhere in the distance, never quite in rhythm. The grass crunched alarmingly under his feet.

He found the loose boards in the fence, slipped through. He crossed the yard, past the dark house and the garbage cans. He found the gate in the wire fence.

Now he was in the tall grass of the orchard; he could feel the moisture soaking through his pants legs as he went. He came out on the old gravel road, trying to walk quietly, but the gravel popped underfoot like firecrackers. He stopped now and then to listen: not a sound except for the distant murmur of the river.

He followed the road for a quarter of a mile until it curved away from the river and became a paved street. Halfway up the first block was the mailbox he wanted. McCabe paused beside it; his mouth was dry. What if, instead of marking the envelope "Not here" and putting it back in the box, the owner had thrown it in the trash—or opened it out of curiosity? He pulled down the lid, reached inside, found the crackling envelope with his fingers and drew it out.

In his basement workshop ten minutes later, he opened the seven envelopes. In each one was a sheaf of crisp folded United States Notes, payable to bearer, in denominations from ten thousand to twenty-five thousand dollars.

McCabe took the corner supports off his railway grid, separated the two one-by-sixes, exposing the space he had carved inside. He put the envelopes into it, along with the documents he had concealed in the toolbox earlier. He

spread white glue on the exposed surfaces of the wood, then put the support together again and replaced it. The whole thing had taken him less than an hour.

After two weeks the Facility called McCabe back to work. For a few days he got a little kidding from the other sorters and mail handlers ("Hey, Mac, where's mine?"); then it was as if nothing had ever happened.

Early in June the green tendrils covered the bean frame, winding around themselves in a corkscrew embrace. Tomatoes were growing, little hard spheroids of a green like the palest jade. On her days off Bonnie worked all afternoon in the garden; McCabe sometimes glimpsed her from the kitchen window, carrying her hoe like a brave soldier.

In October McCabe began reverting to a few habits that Bonnie had trained him out of in the early days of their marriage: he left the cap off the toothpaste, failed to rinse out the tub after a bath. Bonnie made no comment. McCabe discarded his dirty socks under the TV in the living room. Bonnie put them in the washer and said nothing.

McCabe began dropping in at a River Road bar at midnight every day and showing up for work twenty minutes late. The liquor right after breakfast made him dizzy and slightly ill. Early in November he came to work an hour and a half late. Zurcher didn't see him. He punched in and went to his station, where Lloyd Shank and Red Myers were throwing mail. "Hey, buddy," said Shank, "where you been?"

McCabe tried to say something, but it would not go past his tongue. He picked up a shaggy bunch of envelopes and began throwing them at random at the canvas sacks that hung from the frame. Shank and Myers watched him gloomily for a minute, then went back to their own sorting.

McCabe tossed a bunch of envelopes at the sacks to see how many would go in. Not many did; most of them stayed on top or fell between the sacks.

"Hell, take him home," someone said.

Lloyd and Red had him under the arms hustling him into the car. The cool night air made him doze. "Listen, can you make it upstairs by yourself?" Naturally he could. He sat down once unexpectedly on the stairs, but got into the bedroom without waking Bonnie; he took off his shoes and stretched out on the bed; it did not seem worth the trouble to take off his clothes.

Next morning he had a headache; he went to the refrigerator for a bottle of beer.

"Jim, you're drinking so *much,*" Bonnie said. "I don't like to see it."

"Don't look," said McCabe, and twisted the cap off. She left the room.

A few days later he slept in his clothes again, although he was sober. He woke up alone. From that day on, Bonnie slept in her sewing room. She was cordial to him at breakfast, but they no longer met for lunch, even on her days off.

One afternoon she came home and found him eating fried chicken from Colonel Sanders. "Didn't you want to warm up the stew?" she asked.

"Too much trouble," said McCabe indistinctly. He swallowed a mouthful of chicken and picked up some cole slaw with his fingers.

Bonnie sat down. "Jim, what's the matter?"

"Not a damn thing. 'Smatter with you?"

"You know you're going to lose your job."

"Oh, no. *Oh,* no. They won't fire me until I take a poke at Zurcher." The last word sprayed a little.

"Won't you go and talk with Father Vincent?"

McCabe got up without replying and went to the refrigerator for beer.

"Jim, you know you need help."

McCabe's foot skidded on something and he put his hand out to steady himself. The bottle smashed on the floor, foam and bits of brown glass all over. Bonnie stood up, brushing at her legs. Her face was pale. "I can't *take* this anymore," she said, and left the room. He heard her upstairs, banging closet doors.

When she was gone, McCabe felt a vast sense of wonder. For the first time he allowed himself to believe that it was all going to work, that he was actually going to Paris. If he had left Bonnie, it would have been a signal of guilt, but it would be obvious why she was leaving *him*. Now in a couple of months he could get himself fired from the Facility, let the weeds grow in the yard, be seen a few times drunk in public, and then one night he could simply disappear.

All the same, he found it hard to get used to the silence in the house. He went around looking at things Bonnie had left behind: her little typewriter in the sewing room, a gardening glove curled pathetically on a closet shelf.

Monday afternoon the phone rang. "Jim? This is Marge Kennealy. Bonnie's here, she's all right. I just wanted you to know, so you wouldn't worry."

"Yes," said McCabe.

"Do you want to talk to her, or—?"

"No, that's all right. Thanks for calling, Marge. Take care now." He hung up.

Dust was gathering on the furniture, and that was all right, he wanted to leave the house that way, but it got so that he couldn't stand it, and he cleaned up a little—mopped the kitchen floor, did the week's dishes, took the garbage out.

Wednesday afternoon he heard the front door open and

shut. Light footsteps went up the stairs. He listened for the sound of suitcases thumping on the floor, but didn't hear it. He waited, listening in the silence, then went upstairs.

Bonnie had just finished making the bed and was smoothing the coverlet. She turned with a shamefaced look, then took a stop toward him, and to his horror McCabe felt her hot wet cheek on his. "Jim, I can't leave you, I'll never leave you again," she said.

She kissed him. McCabe was paralyzed, unable to say a word. "You go on downstairs now and stay out of my way," she said. "I'm going to clean up this house before I take a shower."

McCabe went down the basement stairs and turned on the bench light. The Pere Marquette locomotive and the 6241 were on the tracks, each with a string of freight cars and gondolas. McCabe saw the brass driving wheels with particular clarity, as if under a magnifying glass.

The transformer hummed as he fed juice to the track. He sat there for a long time, not thinking about anything, watching the trains go around and around.

GOOD-BYE, HENRY J. KOSTKOS, GOOD-BYE

A confession: all through my thirties I clung to the idea that someday I would write a critical history of science fiction. I still have the notes I made for it; here is one sample: "Magazine s-f has continuity, the factor which makes it more vital & more important than book s-f, though the latter has generally been of higher literary quality." There were to have been some general remarks of this kind here and there, but mainly the project would have involved my rereading and evaluating all the stories in the back issues of the magazines from 1926 on, a crushing but congenial task: I saw myself sitting in an easy chair under a lamp, with an open magazine in my lap, a drink in one hand, pen in the other. I have no doubt that at one time I could have got a publisher for such a book, but when I got around seriously to think of doing something about it, I realized that the audience that would have appreciated it was gone. My investment in the stories of Henry J. Kostkos and J. Harvey Haggard had melted away like fairy gold. The lineal succession of stories in the magazines, on which we depended as if it were the law of primogeniture, had ceased to operate, the tradition had

pinched out while we weren't looking. Nobody reads the stories of the 20s and 30s anymore, because, with rare exceptions, they have not survived into the anthologies. It took me a little longer to find out the reason: the wonderful old stories that I remembered with such affection were junk. I know that some critics, P. Schuyler Miller among them, still believe there is a conspiracy to exclude these stories, but the fact is that the early sf magazine writers were terrible, awful, rotten writers; and we did not know it, because we were all in our teens and we were hooked on the marvelous things they wrote *about*.

We grew up in a time when science fiction readers were so few and so isolated that in defense of our own egos we had to invent a mystique of superiority. Some of us carried our adolescent visions of chrome-helmeted supermen into adulthood, and compensated for our unconfessed feelings of inferiority by "the long view"—the vision of mankind's ultimate conquest of the universe, spurred on and perhaps even inspired (who knows?) by Science Fiction Fans! We warped science fiction by our limitless appetite for reassurance, and in a perfect example of circular reasoning, one of us who has kept the faith to this day is able to write, "When all the many highly inventive minds of science-fiction writers find themselves falling again and again into similar patterns, we must perforce say that this does seem to be what all our mental computers state as the shape of the future."

The quotation is from page 42 of *The Universe Makers,* by Donald A. Wollheim (Harper & Row, 1971). Don Wollheim was one of the earliest organizers of fandom, founder of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association and of the Futurian Society, editor of the first important sf anthology (*The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*), and for many years editor-in-chief of Ace Books, the publisher which in 1965

pirated the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy[1]. I take his book for my text not because it is well written, or factually reliable, but because it sums up concisely and even with a sort of stammering eloquence the faith of an old-guard sf fan.

Wollheim speaks for a dwindling majority of sf fans when he tells us that Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series created "the point of departure for the full cosmogony[2] of science-fiction future history." All sf stories laid in the future, Wollheim intimates, can be fitted into this scheme, viz.:

"First, we have the initial voyages to the moon and to the planets of our Solar System. In this sequence we also include stories of the contact of man with intelligent species elsewhere in this system...space pirates, asteroid mining...

"Second, the first flights to the stars.... Commerce—exploitation or otherwise.

"Third, the Rise of the Galactic Empire.... Implacable aliens in the cosmos who must be fought....

"Fourth, the Galactic Empire in full bloom, regardless of what form it takes.... The exploration of the rest of the galaxy by official exploration ships, or adventurers, or commercial pioneers.

"Fifth, the Decline and Fall of the Galactic Empire....

"Sixth, the Interregnum. Worlds reverting to prespace-flight conditions, savagery, barbarism, primitive forms of life, superstition....

"Seventh, the Rise of a Permanent Galactic Civilization.... The exploration of other galaxies and of the entire universe.

"Eighth, the Challenge to God.... The effort to match Creation and to solve the last secrets of the universe...." (*Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.)

For Wollheim and his generation of sf readers, it is humanity's manifest destiny to colonize first the solar system, then the galaxy, and finally the universe. In chapter 26

("Cosmotropism"), Wollheim makes the familiar comparison of mankind on the verge of spaceflight and a mold culture in a Petri dish:

"Let us watch what happens next.... The several spots grow. They begin to touch each other's borders. There is a brief period of stasis, then they grow around and into each other. In time the Petri dish is one solid surface of mold life and no untouched part of the nutriment can be seen. The mold flourishes. It grows dense. It grows tall. It then flowers—it begins to form spore balls.

"Assume that the lid of the dish is taken off. The spore balls reach maturity—they burst and send out into the atmosphere millions and millions of new spore seeds to float away. After this flowering the mold forest begins to diminish. The nutriment of the dish is being exhausted. Some of the mold begins to dry up, to die away...."(*Ibid.*, p. 112.)

Apparently beginning to realize how apt this comparison is, Wollheim adds hastily that we are really not like a mold culture at all, since we are able to think, etc. But what is the basis for this almost universal belief that it is good for us to explore, colonize and annex new lands? (I call it "almost universal," because there are some few nonbelievers—the American Indians, for example, the black people of Africa, etc.) Wouldn't it perhaps be better to stay here on this planet, clean it up a little, and reduce our numbers to some reasonable figure, so that we don't have to "dry up, to die away"?

Wollheim, who is a compassionate man and not completely a fool, is able to see that we have despoiled our growing lands, poisoned our streams and even our oceans, polluted our air and made our cities all but uninhabitable; but he can't see that the same callow idealism that made us welcome the

atomic bomb (because it would lead to the world state and Utopia), urbanization, the Federal highway program, and so on (Progress), will lead us to greater triumphs of stupidity and greed if, God forbid, the program of interstellar conquest he cherishes should ever be carried out.

What the new science fiction writers are telling us is precisely that a culture can't keep on growing geometrically forever; that Bigger isn't necessarily and always Better; that the quality of life is more important now than the quantity; and that we are faced with a whole range of unanswered and mostly unasked questions about ourselves: who are we? where have we come from? where are we going? what is a man? and how should he live? If we are to survive as a culture, which at this hour is not certain, these are the problems we are going to have to solve, and they are exciting as the problems of space-travel were fifty years ago — because they are almost entirely unknown; we've got to do them from scratch.

Science fiction has been changing for the last ten years, not through gradual evolution but in a catastrophic convulsion that has turned father against son and brother against brother. The old guard are interested only in plot and background, and consider it irrelevant to ask whether a science fiction story is well or badly written (and it is no accident that the authors of the most reactionary criticism in science fiction are also responsible for its most abominable prose). But the schism goes much deeper than this. The claim is often made (Wollheim makes it repeatedly) that the old sf is *morally* superior to the new, and in fact the old science fiction is highly moralistic. In a typical space opera, you know that a man is good if he is over six feet tall, with grey or blue eyes, blond or brown hair (black hair and eyes, like the black hat in a Western, are a sign of villainy); if he is

respectful toward women, used to wearing riding boots or puttees, and able to kill with either hand in defense of his mate. In his early and pure form, this hero is invariably of British stock. Later writers have rather self-consciously made him French[3], Jewish (from Israel, however, the home of the Nordic Jews), or even American Indian (from one of the Plains Tribes, the Anglo-Saxon Indians)—but where is the space hero who is an Indian from India, or a black African, or a Malay or a Chinese, or—all right, let's not ask too much—where is the hero who is Italian? And if there were one, what would you want to bet that he would be a *North* Italian?

For contrast, the good man in "A Special Kind of Morning," by Gardner R. Dozois, is a conscript in a future army who, required to kill a null—a human zygote grown and adapted for use as a component in a man-machine computer—refuses because he realizes that "He was human. Everybody was." In Vonda N. McIntyre's "Spectra," the good person—a woman, I think, although the author does not say—is seen as the victim: another plug-in person, blinded, her optic nerves adapted for industrial purposes, whose masters are not cruel but simply indifferent.

This idea, by the way, is not absolutely new. Pohl and Kornbluth used it in their 1959 novel *Wolfbane,* and I suppose you could say there is a remote echo of it in the Durna Rangue stories of Neil R. Jones, published in the 30s, in which human slaves were surgically altered, e.g., by decapitating them and replacing their heads with those of hypertrophied ants. But every such comparison only emphasizes the difference between the old stories and the new. Here are a few more examples which the interested reader may consult for himself:

New	Old
"They Cope," by Dave Skal	"The New Accelerator," by H.G. Wells
"Shark," by Edward Bryant	"Desertion," by Clifford D. Simak
"The Fifth Head of Cerberus," by Gene Wolfe	*The World of Null-A,* by A. E. van Vogt
The Left Hand of Darkness, by Ursula K. Le Guin	"The Bright Illusion," by C. L. Moore
"Continued on Next Rock," by R.A. Lafferty	*She,* by H. Rider Haggard

These comparisons are absurd. I'm trying to demonstrate that although many of the old ideas of science fiction turn up in new guises, that's not what is important. The significant difference is always one of attitude. The sf of the late 20s was full of wonderful gadgets because it seemed then that technology might save us, and any hope was better than none. Today we have seen what the unrestrained technological exploitation of our planet can do to us, and we realize more and more as each day passes that our only hope lies in ourselves. Science fiction is turning inward (and there *are* new ideas here—see Kate Wilhelm's "The Encounter"), not in despair as the old guard would have it, but because that's where the action is. Since, after all, science fiction is a branch of literature and not a magical device for influencing history, what matters most is that the realists are writing very good stories and the idealists are not. But the reason is that the new writers have learned something, and the old guard nothing, from the events of the last forty years.

It can happen that while you're watching an event in the future, time catches up to it and you're looking into the past. The future of the old-guard fans has not merely arrived, it's over, we've had it! There are other futures coming, and that's what keeps us interested in living: no matter how many clouds we see on the horizon, at least every day is new.

NOTES

1. Wollheim alludes to this episode in a typically struthious way: "Those who felt that Tolkien had somehow been injured by the publishing competition rallied to his name with the ardor one would only expect from religious fanatics." (P. 109.)

2. He means "cosmology."

3. This is one degree more latitude than E. E. Smith permitted himself in his *Skylark* stories—his *villain* was French: "Blacky" (please note) DuQuesne.

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Knight

LATE KNIGHT EDITION

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Damon Knight was born in Baker, Oregon on September 19, 1922. He moved to New York City after completing high school and published his first sf story in 1941. He soon became known as a writer and a critic. He was one of the founders of the Milford SF Writers Conference and has continued to play a major role in the Clarion workshop series, an outgrowth of Milford. He founded the Science Fiction Writers of America and was editor of *Orbit,* the original anthology series that dominated the Nebula Awards in the late sixties. Damon and his wife, Kate Wilhelm, were Guests of Honor at the 1980 World Science Fiction Convention, Noreascon II. They now reside in Eugene, Oregon.

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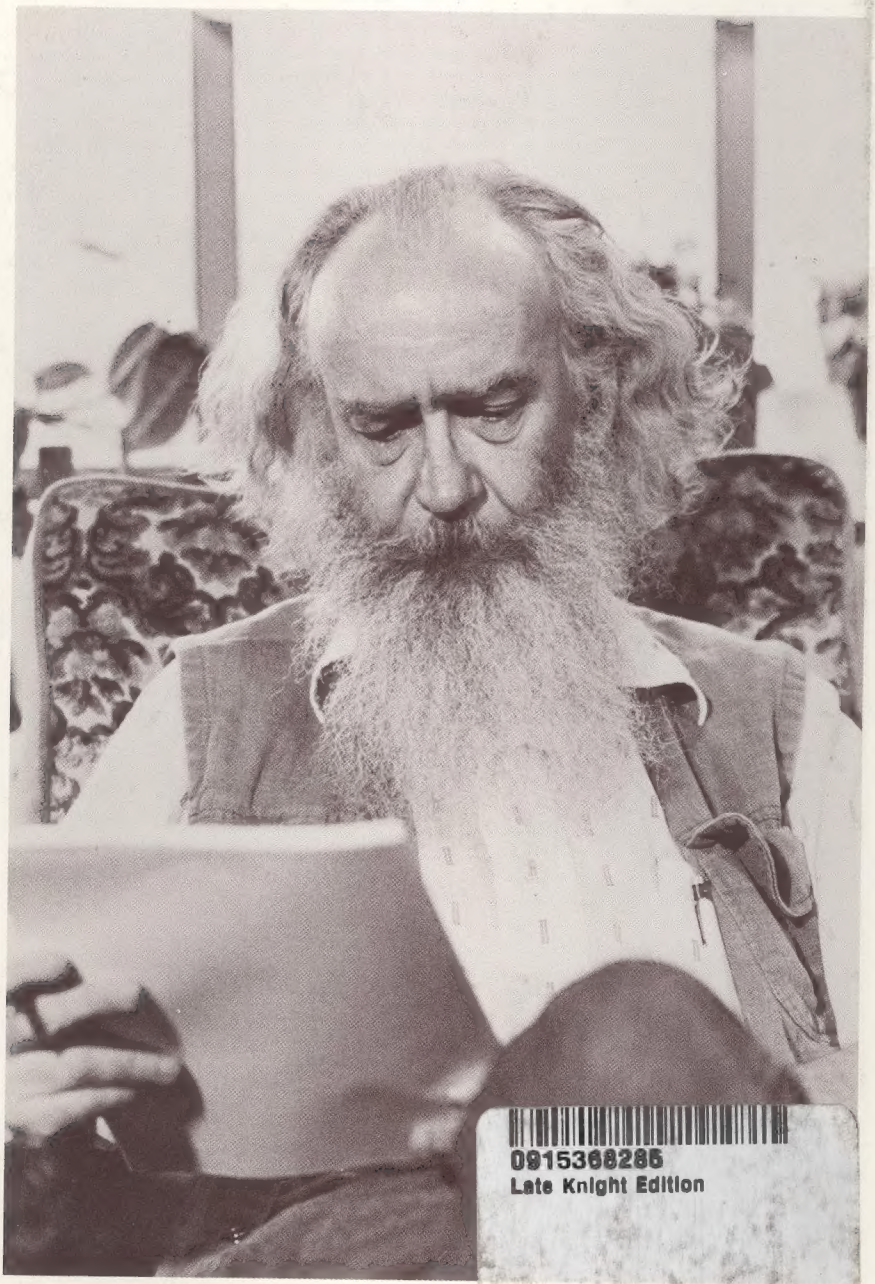

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